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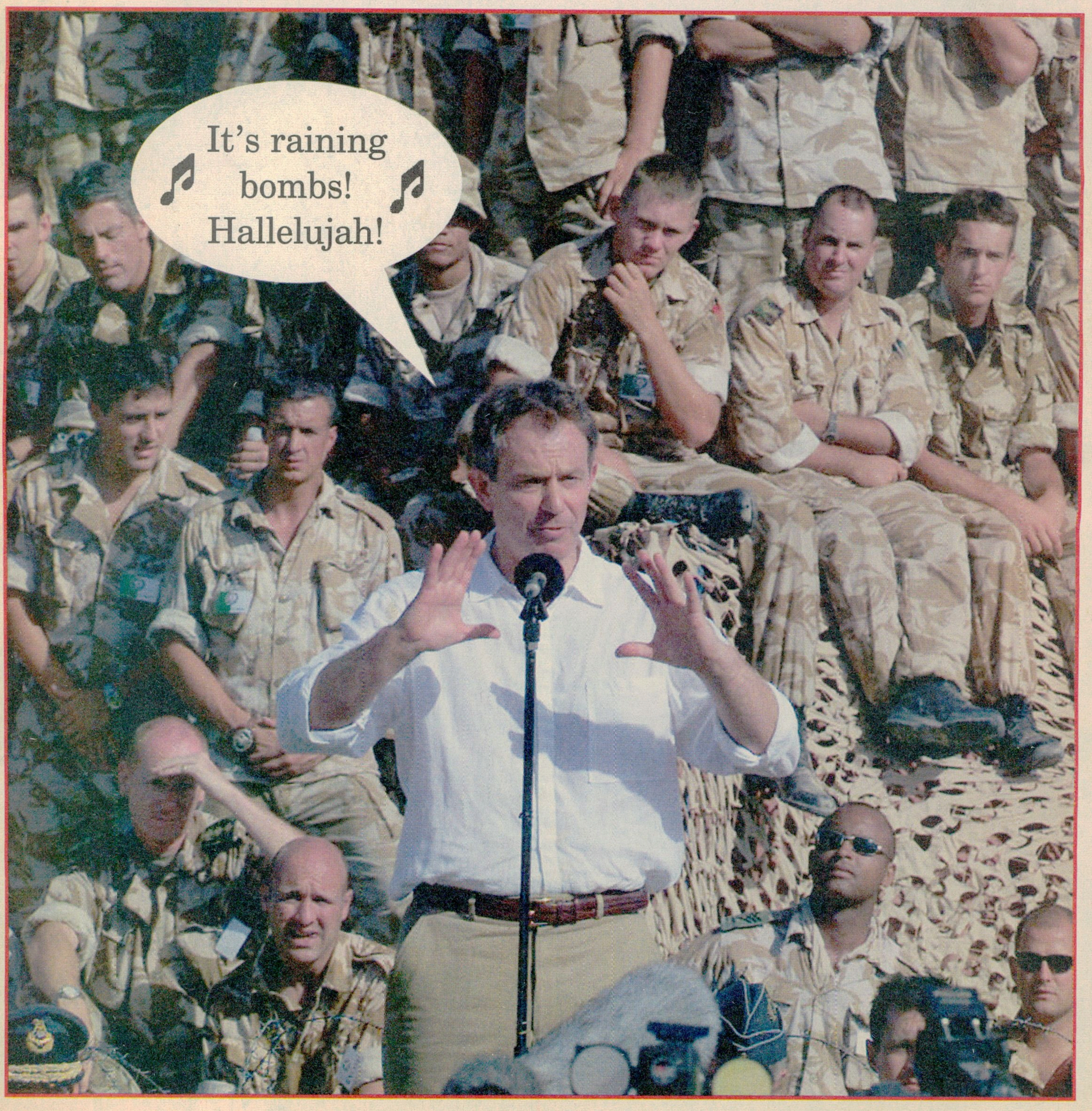
BLAIRY HALLIWELL ENTERTAINS THE TROOPS



Alfa

Gnome

THE Government's disgraceful act of betrayal over Railtrack has finally shown the Private Sector that New Labour cannot be trusted.

Those of us who put money into Railtrack did so as an act of faith on the understanding that whatever happened, we would be provided with huge dividends by the grateful taxpayer. Imagine our shock and dismay when it transpires that shares can go down as well as up and that this company could go bust just like any other.

The prospectus made no mention of losing money and I for one believed in good faith that I was on a gravy train which would never hit the buffers.

How can capitalism continue to function if shareholders can no longer be sure that they will be bailed out by the government when things go wrong?

E. Strobes
Lord Gnome
(in the first class compartment on a train somewhere outside Didcot Parkway)

"It's his Gung-holier-than-thou attitude I can't stand

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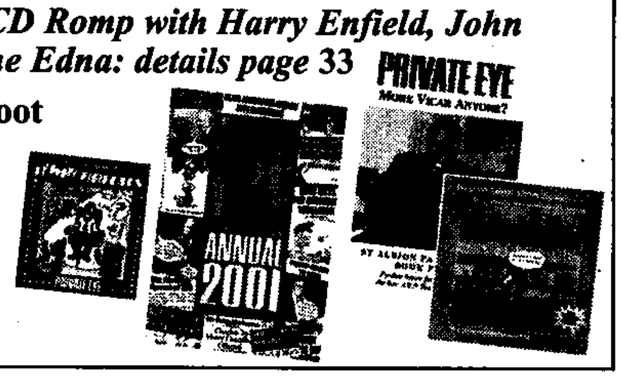


"Much of the $24m traced and frozen since 11 September appears to have a greater connection to the Taliban regime than to bin Laden or Al-Qaeda, unless you accept the Bush/Blair spin that they are one and the same."

● *Slicker on the trail of bin Laden booty, 28*

THE demise of Railtrack marks a remarkable treble whammy for former civil servant Jennie Page. As a former director of the Millennium Dome, Equitable Life and Railtrack she has achieved the amazing feat of being associated with the three British mega-disasters of the past year.

With consummate timing she threw a party at Skinners' Hall in the City the other day — to celebrate her wedding to Jeremy Orme, an adviser to the Financial Services Authority. Perhaps her pledge to stand by her man "for richer, for poorer" will also be extended to the many Equitable Life policyholders and Railtrack investors who have benefited so hugely from Jennie's talents.

● *Full report on Failtrack, page 12*

FOLLOWING the row over the leaked memo from transport secretary Stephen Byers' special adviser Jo Moore (she thought 11 September "a very good day to get out anything we want to bury"), hacks have been searching for "hidden" stories. Most, however, missed the way the announcement of Metronet as preferred bidder for London Underground's sub-surface lines popped out on 20 September.

Metronet, led by Balfour Beatty, is already preferred bidder for the Bakerloo, Victoria and City lines. Giving Balfour Beatty the sub-surface Circle, District, Metropolitan, Hammersmith and City and East London lines as well will put the firm that was responsible for the Hatfield crash in charge of two thirds of the tube – a fact that received only limited comment in the wake of the "war on terror".

This would have been particularly pleasing for Moore, whose special responsibility at transport has been to try to catch out Ken Livingstone over the public-private partnership. Moore is particularly enthusiastic about privatisation, having worked for the lobbyist Westminster Strategy, a firm that represented a number of privatisers.

The low-key announcement of Balfour Beatty's role is in keeping with the general way that the opposition to privatisation, which was reaching a crescendo in the build-up to the Labour conference, has become a piece of collateral damage in the "war on terror".

SOME weeks before the trade towers atrocity, the private airlines that run the new part-privatised air traffic control network got together to consider how they could save money in their new project.

According to a spokesman they "looked at air traffic controllers of comparable size" and discovered to their delight that the foreign controllers had 20 percent fewer administrative and support staff than their British equivalent. Joyfully, they decided to cut back their own support and administrative staff by 20 percent over five years, at a huge saving to the new company of some £60m.

Then came the trade towers collapse, and the companies — including Virgin, British Airways, British Midland and Easyjet — decided on prompter action. The savings (sackings) will now be made over one year, not five.

HOW PARLIAMENT WORKS

MUCH to his surprise, and everyone else's, Paul Marsden, a mild-mannered quality assurance manager, was elected Labour MP for the rock solid Tory seat of Shrewsbury in 1997 and was re-elected in 2001.

He is obviously still trying to find his feet at Westminster. For he turned up in the Commons for the "debate" on 8 October about the war in Afghanistan and was surprised when he discovered that MPs were not going to vote on the subject. Before the debate started he got to his feet on a point of order.

"There is growing disquiet," he observed, "that for the third time parliament has been recalled yet hon. members have been denied a vote on this war. Can you confirm to me that there will be no vote? Is it in order for hon. members to vote on an adjournment debate if similar occasions arise when we are denied a substantive motion from the government?"

The MP was obviously being ignorant or impertinent and needed to be put down firmly. The speaker, Michael Martin, replied: "It seems as though the hon. gentleman is getting advice already. Procedural advice is best given privately at the chair. If the hon. gentleman wishes to come to the chair I will give him some private advice."

The Commons collapsed in laughter at the sight and sound of a backbencher being so firmly patronised and, as British soldiers, sailors and airmen prepared to go to war in Afghanistan, their representatives proceeded to a debate without a substantive motion and without a vote.

● *More Warballs, page 5*

QUOTE OF THE TRIAL

"I despair of this litigation. It is never-ending. It is the most disproportionate litigation I have ever been involved with at the bar."

— Mr Justice Gray, just before close of play in Condliffe v Pressdram on Friday 12 October.

● *For a full report see page 7.*

NEWS

EMERGING from her bunker, Baroness Thatcher sternly chides British Muslim leaders for not having been sufficiently fierce in their condemnation of Afghan terrorism. "Passengers on those planes were told that they were going to die and there were children on board," she declares. "They must say that is disgraceful."

Perhaps the old girl's memory has finally gone AWOL. Otherwise she must surely remember Abdul Haq, a self-confessed Afghan terrorist who in September 1984 planted a bomb at Kabul airport, killing 28 people — most of them schoolchildren who were preparing to fly to Moscow.

His purpose, he explained, was "to warn people not to send their children to the Soviet Union". He also defended the firing of long-range rockets at Kabul, which had killed many civilians and children. "We use poor rockets, we cannot control them," he shrugged. "They sometimes miss. I don't care… If I kill 50 civilians and the Russians kill millions, why don't people talk about that?"

Did Thatcher think he was "disgraceful"? Apparently not: in 1986 she invited him to fly to London at the taxpayers' expense and meet her in Downing Street, where she drooled all over the young "freedom-fighter" and urged him to continue the struggle.

HARD-PRESSED British exporters have been wondering why government financial support has been cut this year, despite businesses facing some of the toughest battles for overseas sales in a decade.

The answer comes in a blistering memo to senior managers of British Trade International from their chief executive Sir David Wright. It seems that BTI – a joint venture between the foreign office and trade department, whose job is to help British exporters — wildly overspent its budget last year and had to be bailed out by the DTI to the tune of £2.7m.

"This overspend has made us look like a bunch of amateurs," moans Sir David, former ambassador to Japan. "I will have to carry the can for this personally. It will almost certainly be before the public accounts committee: no doubt a very unpleasant experience which I do not relish at all. And given the timing, it may even affect my own pay — not yours." What a shame.

AT THE time of its glitzy launch in January 2000, Matrix chambers starring Cherie Booth QC was described by a founder member as: "A one-stop shop for all your human rights and civil liberties needs."

The description must have particularly appealed to Mohammed Sani Abacha, son of that firm believer in human rights, former Nigerian military dictator General Sani Abacha. In the second week of October, lawyers representing Mohammed Sani, who is currently languishing in a Nigerian jail awaiting trial for conspiracy to murder, and his business manager, Abubakar Attiku Bagudu, mounted a judicial review in the high court. They are appealing against the decision by former home secretary Jack Straw to hand over evidence of alleged money laundering by the Abacha family to criminal investigations being conducted by the Swiss and Nigerian authorities.

The Abachas were represented in court by Clare Montgomery QC, who is described in the Chambers Guide to the legal profession as having done a "fantastic job" for General Pinochet whom she represented in UK extradition hearings, and who is also a leading member of… Matrix chambers.

"Congratulations, it's a bomb!"

Street Of Shame

AHMED Rashid, the *Daily Telegraph*'s veteran correspondent in Pakistan, is one of the world's greatest experts on the Afghan regime. Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell have both let it be known that they are reading his book *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. So is the *Torygraph* making the most of its good fortune by running long features from Rashid?

Er, no. His contributions in recent weeks have been confined to short reports for the news pages. Although the foreign editor has often suggested at morning conference that the paper should print something more substantial by Rashid, the fogeyish triumvirate in charge of the op-ed page — Charles Moore, Dean Godson, Daniel Johnson — consistently decline the offers.

Is there some kind of prejudice against allowing a Muslim with a foreign name into the hallowed portals of the opinion page? Of course not. The fogeys believe, quite rightly, that their space is better filled with far more authoritative pieces from chaps such as Sir John Keegan, who informed *Torygraph* readers last week that "this war belongs within the much older conflict between settled, creative, productive westerners and predatory, destructive Orientals". He also revealed that "westerners fight face to face, in stand-up battle", whereas "Orientals, by contrast, shrink from pitched battle… preferring ambush, surprise, treachery and deceit".

How can Ahmed Rashid compete with such awesome scholarship? Or, for that matter, with the profound reflections of Barbara Amiel (wife of *Telegraph* owner Conrad Black), whose lengthy essays add such tone to the op-ed page? In one of her features after the attacks on New York and Washington, Amiel claimed that Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, president of the United Arab Emirates, had appeared on Palestinian television advocating the slaughter of all Jews and Americans.

If Amiel or her fogey editors knew anything about the Gulf they might have twigged that this was manifest nonsense, since the Sheikh is in fact a well-known "moderate" and long-standing ally of the West. A few days later the paper had to publish a grovelling apology for Amiel's "inadvertent error". Yet it persists in its conviction that the proprietor's wife is a better commentator on such subjects than the hapless Ahmed Rashid.

Still, at least Rashid has some consolations. His own employers may not think he has any useful insights, but other newspapers such as the *Washington Post* have been queuing up to run features by him. Oh, and his Taliban book has reached number one on the amazon.com best-seller list.

SO, no change in standards at Richard Desmond's pisspoor *Daily Express*: when a genuine world exclusive fell into its lap – about hackette Yvonne Ridley's adventures with the Taliban – the paper still managed to screw up.

It couldn't resist hyping its "world exclusive" to the nth degree. Thus the front page splash on 9 October screamed: "Freed from Taliban hell; I lay terrified in my bed inside filthy, rat-infested prison cell; I went on hunger strike and fought with vicious guards; I risked death to keep secret diary for *Express* readers."

Except that readers then had to search in vain for the reporter's account of her fight with vicious guards… which didn't happen. Instead Ridley wrote on an inside page: "I was never physically hurt in any way." Nor was there any mention in her copy of being in a rat-infested cell. "The Taliban had cleaned the cell and made it hygienic," she said.

AT Wapping, during a full and frank discussion of the international situation, two *Sun* hacks referred to Arabs as "ragheads". A member of the paper's online team who has Arabic ancestry lodged a formal complaint at once.

Realising that he could go to an industrial tribunal and win thousands of pounds — plus acres of bad publicity for the newspaper — horrified *Sun* bosses ordered the hacks to apologise. Which they did, albeit grudgingly. Managing editor Chris Roycroft-Davis has now put around a memo warning that *Sun* staff will be disciplined if they use "behaviour or remarks that are offensive to another person".

Can this by any chance be the same paper which has for so long entertained readers with headlines such as "Hop Off You Frogs" and "The *Sun* Bans the Hun"?

A RECENT *Daily Record* — "the paper that real Scots read" — couldn't contain its excitement at the news that Scotland was doing its bit for the war effort.

"OUR SUBS LEAD STRIKES," it raved. "Scots based crew launch Tomahawk missiles at top targets… HMS Trafalgar and HMS Triumph, two submarines from the Faslane naval base on the Clyde, led the British involvement in Operation Enduring Freedom… The Faslane-based T-class hunter-killer subs launched around 50 Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles…"

Thrilling and patriotic stuff — except that Trafalgar and Triumph (and the rest of the T-class) are based at Plymouth Devonport, almost as far from Faslane as one can get without being abroad.

AT THE News Corp agm last week the Dirty Digger paid handsome tribute to the *Sunday Times*, which he described as the most "outstanding" newspaper in the group. *ST* editor John Witherow promptly emailed a report of the speech to all staff, under the heading: "Congratulations to all."

The boost to morale was short-lived. A mere 15 minutes later, *ST* hacks received a second email, this time from managing editor Richard Caseby. "It will be necessary to reduce our headcount," he announced. "I envisage that the worst case scenario will be that the *Sunday Times* has to make eight staff posts redundant and end nine retainer contracts." He also urged all staff to "cooperate fully in implementing cutbacks in other areas, such as the 20 percent reduction in expenses".

The crisis in Murdoch's empire is clearly worse than we thought: hacks at his British newspapers then discovered that their free supplies of tea and coffee had been stopped forthwith.

WHO says the Tories are irrelevant? The day after their party conference opened in Blackpool, the *Daily Mail*, one-time standard-bearer of the right, dedicated an entire half-page to proceedings.

It was displayed prominently on page 37, just ten pages back from the news that fish fingers are no longer made from cod.

ON 2 October Piers Moron's *Mirror* published a map showing where terrorist attacks have taken place around the globe since 11 September. Should someone tell the Tamil Tigers that they seem to have blown up Madagascar twice, while Jerusalem appears to have moved to Cyprus?

The *Moron* is not the only media outlet confused by the new focus on previously ignored parts of the globe inspired by the current international situation. On 25 September CNN broadcast a map of Europe clearly identifying the Czech Republic as Switzerland.

A LONG, heart-tugging story in the London *Evening Standard* last month described the case of a man with a low sex-drive who was left "in misery and in debt" after a London clinic charged him thousands of pounds for pills and potions he could have bought off the shelf.

"James saw an ad for the Harley Street Wellman Clinic in this newspaper and made an appointment to visit on 22 May this year," it reported. "What he didn't know was that there were two clinics with virtually the same name. One, called simply the Wellman Clinic, is an entirely respectable establishment based in Weymouth Street… The other, the Harley Street Wellman Clinic, is the one James approached."

The *Standard* revealed that Westminster council's trading standards office is now investigating the second clinic, after receiving several similar complaints. One might deduce from this sorry story that the *Standard* would no longer carry adverts of the kind that got James into trouble. But one would be wrong: the 8 October edition included two separate advertisements promising "proven medical techniques" for impotence and erectile dysfunction. Both were from, er, the Harley Street Wellman Clinic.

IN the same month that fog-horn voiced hack John Sweeney left the *Observer* for pastures new, old *Observer* hand David Rose found himself returning to his old stamping ground.

One internal memo marked the passing of this glorious moment: "Oh my God, it's a mad fucker exchange."

***GRAUNIAD* diarist Marina "Snyde" Hyde really seems to have it in for *Sun* editor David Yelland.**

On 4 October she published a non-story about some actor with the same name whom Yelland once "attempted" to befriend. On 27 September she criticised Yelland's *Currant Bun* leader for solemnly referring to Roosevelt's warning to editors when the US declared war on Japan, while running trivial front page stories as "EastEnder Phil Quits".

On 11 September she simply wrote: "Would the helpful doctors who advised us in connection with sectioning *Sun* editor David Yelland kindly get in touch again? There is another matter on which I wish to consult you."

For some reason, however, Hyde fails to direct any of her biting wit at Yelland's equally absurd tabloid rival, *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan. Why not? Perhaps the *Guardian* diary's sinister and unGuardianlike feature "Surveillance" (an idea itself nicked from the dismal 3am slappers on the *Mirror*'s diary) could help? Or perhaps they could just bring back Matthew Norman to run the column instead?

***DAILY Telegraph* racing editor Adrian Hunt was an early faller at Ascot last month when sports editor David Welch organised a beano for the great and the good of his department. Hunt was under starters' orders in the hospitality box well before the 1.30pm off, and was soon congratulating the paper's star columnist, Lord (Sebastian) Coe, on his success at the 1980 Olympics.**

Unfortunately Hunt seemed to think that he was in fact talking to Coe's old rival Steve Ovett. "It was great when you beat that tosser Coe," he declared. "What did you really think of him?"

At this point Welch stepped in to lead Hunt off to the stables. A stewards' inquiry has now been launched at Canary Wharf.

WARBALLS

"On the day of Agincourt, Henry V sighed that 'gentlemen in England now a-bed will think themselves accurs'd they were not here.'

"On the day of the terrorist attack on America, much the same dread must have motivated *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan to stumble from his post-operative bed into Canary Wharf…

"At such times, journalists are taken over by the basic instincts that call us to our art and mystery. The hunger to witness events. The thirst to tell the story. We have to be in that number when the saints go marching in…

"Imagine the torment of *Daily Express* editor Chris Williams, trapped on holiday in Sardinia.

"His consolation was that his team more than held its own against the rivals… The irony of truly sensational events is that the very worst of them bring out the very best in journalism. And in journalists." — Editorial, *UK Press Gazette*.

"Manhattan that morning was a diagram, a blue bar-chart with columns which were tall or not so tall. A silver cursor passed across the screen and clicked silently on the tallest column, which turned red and black and presently vanished. This is how we delete you. The cursor returned and clicked on the second column. Presently a thing like a solid grey-white cauliflower rose until it was a mountain covering all south Manhattan."
— Neal Ascherson, *London Review of Books*.

"On the stroke of 9am yesterday, the Red Ensign was raised above the bridge roof atop the aircraft carrier Illustrious, the Union Flag on the bow was lowered and two tugs gradually pulled the ship away from the quayside in Salalah. As the flagship of the British naval task force in the Gulf headed out into the Indian Ocean, Capt. Charles Style, 47, the ship's commander, stood on the bridge roof, his binoculars hanging from his neck by a gold cord… Nearby, a female rating, her blonde hair blowing in the warm breeze, manned a machinegun." — Breathless despatch from David Graves aboard the Illustrious, *Daily Telegraph*.

"This is a war of symbolism… I wasn't surprised about the attack — I had even expected it and I had written about it in *Architecture 2000 & Beyond*." — Leading post-modernist Charles Jencks, *Building Design*.

"Difficult as these events have been, and continue to be, we are mindful as well of the need to return our attention to our daily lives. For those of you who find solace in resuming your work, we offer these links to recent articles published at mckinseyquarterly.com." — Message from McKinsey promoting its newsletter, *McKinsey Quarterly*.

"In the wake of this terrible act, it is encouraging to see the world pulling together… As we move forward, Marriott is working hard with President Bush and the travel industry to help get America moving again. For you, our most loyal guests, we are offering Marriott's Rewarding Weekends and bonus miles at Renaissance Hotels, Resorts and Suites. In addition, more than 1,500 Marriott hotels have just relaunched their fall Come Out and Play weekend rates. Additional values are planned for this winter, as well, because many of you have recently let me know – you're traveling once again, and agree with me – travel is one of our most cherished freedoms.

"I can't thank you enough for your loyalty and support during these challenging times." — Letter from J. W. Marriott Jr, chairman and CEO of Marriott International Inc, to hotel group's customers.

"It is far from clear whether last week's vote in the Scottish Assembly to ban hunting with dogs will result in such a ban coming on to the statute books, because of the practical difficulties already encountered in committee. Nevertheless, the timing of the vote could hardly have been more unfortunate… Many of our armed forces will want to come home to a land of tradition and tolerance, in which the long-established sport of hunting is allowed to continue." — Editorial in *Country Life*.

"As a PR consultant I have just come out of four weeks of what I thought was hell, handling the previous Afghan refugee situation on board one of my client's ships, MV Tampa, but the horrific events in New York and Washington demonstrate how futile the world of PR is.
— Letter in *PR Week*.

"Over the last few weeks we have become increasingly concerned with the current situation in Afghanistan. With this in mind we would like to offer you the following products at reduced prices in an attempt to assist with the rescue efforts.
Individually wrapped PVC groundsheets.
Tarp on a roll pre-eyeletted polythene sheeting.
Large groundsheets in woven polyethylene.
Body bags. — Letter from Flexible Reinforcements Ltd, Clitheroe, Lancs.

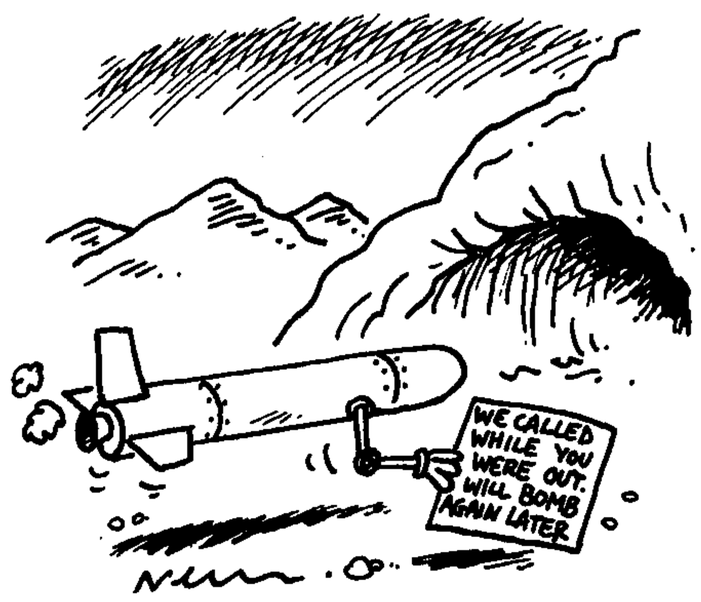
Some recent corporate messages sent to employees of J.P. Morgan Chase:

14 September: "We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to everyone for their professionalism and contribution during this difficult time. Please know that we are doing everything in our power to return to normal as soon as possible."

21 September: "Our colleagues worldwide have worked tirelessly for the past 10 days to fulfil our obligations to clients… We applaud their outstanding efforts; we are grateful for their professionalism and understanding; we are proud to have them as colleagues."

2 October: "Your response during the last three weeks has been outstanding. I am proud of the way that each of us in EMEA has responded to this challenge. Thank you for all your ongoing dedication and hard work."

8 October: "Senior management has decided to cancel Christmas parties this year throughout the EMEA region. Although these events are a wonderful opportunity for everyone to celebrate the season, it's been decided that this is the right course of action given the sobering events of 11 September and the slow conditions in many of our businesses."



THE Great War Leader may come to rue the day he turned his government into a one-man band, with a few favoured advisers thrown in for good measure.

Cabinet meetings have been as perfunctory as usual and parliament has met only three times since the 11 September attacks. On the last occasion military action was already underway as MPs arrived at Westminster.

The parliamentary Labour party is divided into a small hawkish faction, an even smaller "peace now" faction, with the bulk of MPs cautious, jittery and waiting to see how the dust settles.

The PM has set up a "war cabinet", which sensibly includes his old adversary Gordon Brown. But the chancellor's exceptionally stern demeanour during the Great War Leader's Labour conference speech should not be confused with enthusiastic support for the actual war against Osama bin Laden and his bunch of fanatics. For the brooding chancellor sees many of his best laid plans turning to ashes as recession rears its ugly head, and especially now as defence chiefs demand that he open his coffers to let them fire British cruise missiles, instead of having to ask the Americans for theirs.

Neither will Brown have been delighted as the Great War Leader's poll ratings soar further into the stratosphere, thus dampening his chances ever further. So it is hardly surprising he has let it be known that he is not best pleased with ardent Blairista Stephen Byers for closing down Railtrack and leaving the company's shareholders in the lurch. Any successor to Railtrack will only be able to secure City investment with the treasury as last stop banker. The Great War Leader made explicit reference to Railtrack's dismal record during his conference speech, and Byer's decision could not have come without the approval of Number 10, rather than from the treasury.

As the fabled Blair PR machine fails to win over the Arabs, who can believe that other Labour stalwarts such as Margaret Beckett and Clare Short don't share many of the reservations of their backbench colleagues with the Great Helmsman's military campaign?

Shortly after Tony Blair returned from a whistle stop tour of the Gulf States during which he had used a series of high profile TV interviews to counter accusations that Britain and America were engaged in a war against Islam, a bizarre picture appeared in the *Sun*. It depicted a grinning Mr Tony standing next to a squaddie, whose T shirt was proudly emblazoned with the legend: "We came, we saw, we kicked ass." Having his "ass kicked" was Iraqi strong man Saddam Hussein - not yet a target for the international coalition. Unless Mr Tony knows differently.

"NEW" Labour spin mistress Jo Moore is no new kid on the block. Such were her Machiavellian skills that her name remained virtually unknown outside government circles despite nearly 20 years of political fixing for whoever was in charge of the Labour party at any given time.

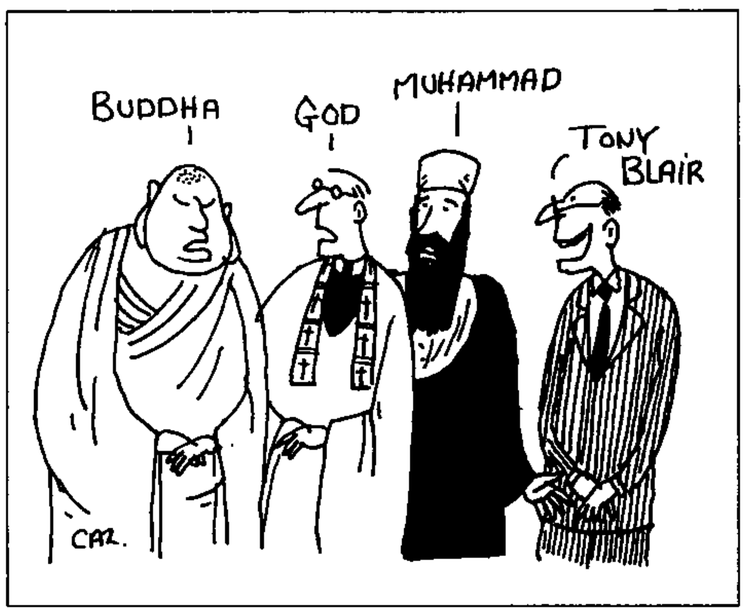
In this respect she far outshines the legendary former Labour general-secretary Margaret McDonagh, who has just sold her services to "Dirty" Richard Desmond at Express Newspapers. Ms Moore has long been a fixture and fixer behind the scenes in the Hornsey and Wood Green constituency of Barbara Roche, making it one of the first local Labour parties to be "modernised". But it was as an apparatchik in the National Organisation of Labour Students that Ms Moore first made her mark.

During a particularly traumatic and sometimes violent conference of that august body which took place in York during the early 80s, the Militant Tendency and co-conspirators, Socialist Organiser, were within two votes of securing control. That they had the two ballot papers in the bag was never in doubt — but as to where the ballot papers actually went? Someone should ask Ms Moore and friends.

THE exhortations by George Bush and Rudy Giuliani to return to "business as usual" have apparently not reached the student politicos of the Oxford Union.

A posse of Labour and Tory MPs descended on the Union last Friday to debate the traditional annual motion "that this house has no confidence in Her Majesty's government". Shortly before leaving Westminster, however, they received an urgent message: the wording had been changed to "this house has no confidence in Her Majesty's government's domestic policies", since it was thought improper to discuss international affairs at a time of, er, international crisis. Speakers were begged under no circumstances to mention the war.

Meanwhile, a debate scheduled for next month — "this house believes that Brits are funnier than Americans" — has been cancelled altogether. Well done, Oxford!



NUCLEAR FALL OUT

THE government announced its decision to press ahead with a MOX (mixed oxide) spent plutonium reprocessing facility at BNFL's Sellafield plant in Cumbria on 3 October, the final decision taken by environment minister Margaret Beckett and health secretary Alan Milburn.

In a written briefing to the parliamentary Labour party, Beckett explained that since BNFL's plans now "reached EU basic safety standards", and because BNFL had completed the MOX plant in 1996, "its benefits exceed its detriments". BNFL's intensive lobbying had, it seems, paid off, and the Beckett briefing was at pains to stress the negligible threat of radiation to surrounding "wildlife".

The MOX plant will reprocess spent plutonium imported by sea from countries, it is hoped, such as Japan; yet since 3 October Beckett has refused to answer MPs' questions on whether her decision had been reassessed in the light of the 11 September attacks in America.

David Kydd, a spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Authority, when asked on the possible threat of planes being flown into nuclear reactors — never mind ships transporting plutonium — said recently: "We cannot afford to dismiss this risk."

Beckett and Milburn do not think such a risk warrants further investigation, but they were sufficiently concerned to include the following question and answer in the same PLP briefing paper. "Q: Was the decision [to press ahead with MOX] delayed in order to assess the terrorist threat? A: Ministers always said that they would take the decision once all relevant factors had been considered."

In fact the advisory group on renewable and other energies which has been working closely with the government was sufficiently concerned at the threat posed by international terrorism to the shipment of spent plutonium and uranium, it had urged further delay on any decision. Some members of the panel, and others within DEFRA, including some ministers, were convinced that any decision would have to be postponed. They had not reckoned on the government's famed news management skills honed by shadowy figures such as Jo Moore.

"Some groups may plan a legal challenge to the decision," wrote Beckett in her briefing document. At least she got this right: Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have filed papers in the high court. They argue that the "economic benefits of the scheme have been distorted as the £472m of taxpayers' money spent so far, mostly on constructing the MOX plant, have been disregarded", and "there is insufficient evidence that potential customers, such as the Japanese, will ever materialise".

WARMINSTER
CONSERVATIVE CLUB

Appearing
Saturday 29th September

DAZED AND CONFUSED

Warminster Journal

TALIBANBALLS

Sign displayed in the flight office of United Nations in Islamabad:

ATTENTION. It is to notify that with immediate effect following items are declared "BANNED" by Taliban Authorities for import to Afghanistan. All passengers travelling in UN Aircrafts to Afghanistan are requested to abide by the restriction I imposed in its true spirit:

- Satellite phone
- Pig
- Pork
- Pig's oil
- Things that have been made from human's hair
- Human's hair in natural form
- VCR
- Cinematography machine including voice recorder projector
- Intergraph machine in case it is used in Cinama
- All of instruments that produce music like Tanbor, Rohbab and Sarang (kind of guitar or lute) in short all kinds of musical instruments or its extra tools
- Billiard's board and its instruments
- Chess
- Cram board
- Play cards
- Face's mask
- All kinds of pure alcoholic drinks
- All kinds of cassettes type, Computer video and TV which contain pornographic scenes and sex
- Beer
- Lobster, which a kind of animal
- Nails varnish
- Explosives material for playing
- Fireworks material for children's play
- Any kind of cinematography's films even if it is exported to abroad
- Tables having picture
- All kind of animate idols
- Tailoring albums having living pictures
- Christmas Cards
- Congratulatory cards having living pictures
- Necktie
- Bow
- Special pin for necktie.

With best regards, (signed) manager, aircraft operations, UNOCHA, Islamabad.

CONDLIFFE v. PRESSDRAM

THE TRIAL of the mammoth libel action Condliffe v. Pressdram & Hislop (and others) began on Tuesday 2 October 2001 in court 14 of the royal courts of justice, before Mr Justice Gray. Geoffrey Shaw QC opened the case for the plaintiff, West Country accountant John Stuart Condliffe, who claims to have been libelled in an article published in the Sally Deedes column in *Private Eye* in March 1992.

The article alleged that Mr Condliffe, as the only chartered accountant in the Liskeard-based firm of Condliffe Hilton in south-east Cornwall, had given clients an indication of the likely cost of his services and two or three years later had submitted invoices far in excess of the figure expected. The allegations related to some 30 of Mr Condliffe's clients, of whom the *Eye* had spoken to 15. Both sides agreed the article implied that Mr Condliffe had acted dishonestly by deliberately overcharging his clients and deceiving them about the amount of fees they would have to pay. The Eye is defending the action and claims that the article is true.

Mr Shaw, addressing Mr Justice Gray sitting alone as both sides had agreed to forgo a jury trial, described Condliffe Hilton in 1989 as a "successful firm of chartered accountants" whose clients were "often small business people", and described the overall picture of the firm at that time: "It was not in any respect unusual. Its clients, its methods of work were not unusual. The hourly charge out rates were not unusual, were typical of other provincial firms."

Mr Shaw then moved forward two years to 13 February 1991 (there may be some confusion over this date as a *little later* Mr Shaw referred to 13 February 1992). On this date, he said: "It seems some aggrieved clients or former clients of Condliffe Hilton met together." He listed those present at this meeting, including Mr Stevens and Mr Arkell, who were named in the *Private Eye* article, and concluded: "The publication of the *Private Eye* article on March 27 1992 seems clearly to be in some sense the consequence or product of the meeting of 13 February that year."

What might be the causes of this "remarkable situation as far as Condliffe Hilton is concerned?" asked Mr Shaw. The defendant's case was that these clients had been overcharged, he said, but as the hourly rates which Mr Condliffe and others in his firm charged for their services were not in dispute, this meant that the case would hinge on time records.

Mr Shaw then referred to another possible material factor also referred to in the *Private Eye* article, the recession. "There is evidence of the recession biting and Mr Condliffe being less willing to allow his clients credit than in easier times he had been." He described how on 27 August 1993 his client became personally bankrupt, principally because he had borrowed money to finance his stake in a local hotel which became more difficult to finance after the outbreak of trouble with his clients.

The third possible cause of this "remarkable situation" was, according to Mr Shaw: "That it could have something to do with Jeremy Frewer who left the firm in circumstances which are in dispute."

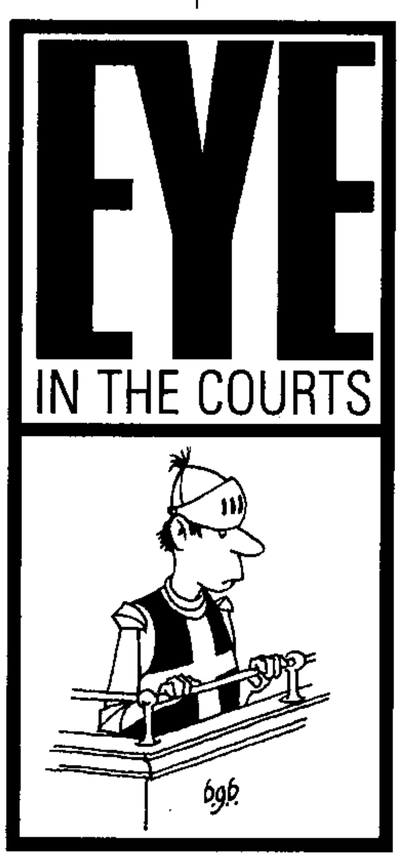
Mr Shaw described how after leaving Condliffe Hilton Mr Frewer began practising as a chartered accountant from home, in competition with his former firm and substantially undercutting its prices. "We have evidence that he was telling Condliffe Hilton's clients that if they joined him they wouldn't have to pay Condliffe Hilton's bills," Mr Shaw told the court.

When Mr Shaw had concluded his opening speech, Mr Ronald Thwaites QC, counsel for the defence, applied to Mr Justice Gray to change the order of defence witnesses and to call the defendant's expert accountant witness, Mr Emile Woolf, first. One reason he gave for this was the recent increase of the number of trial bundles by the plaintiff's solicitors from 28 to 113. Mr Justice Gray said he was "absolutely horrified" by this increase. Mr Thwaites said: "This is a new set of documents to saturate the court with irrelevant material at vast expense... a cynical attempt to obfuscate."

Mr Elliott, junior counsel for the claimant, refuted what Mr Thwaites had said: "These are agreed bundles. There have been opportunities for the defendant to make an objection and it has not come. It was genuinely thought that a presentation of clients' files in chronological order truly reflects those clients and indicates what work was or was not necessary, how it was charged for and whether or not it was excessively charged for."

When the court returned to the matter the following morning of Thursday 4 October and the judge indicated that he was minded to allow Mr Thwaite's application, Mr Shaw said: "It's high time I told Your Lordship that I'm not ready to cross-examine Mr Woolf through no fault of my own." He said that because of the timetable of delivery of trial documents and witness statements he had been unable to start work on the case until the end of August. Mr Justice Gray asked Mr Shaw when he would be ready to cross-examine Mr Woolf. Mr Shaw replied that he would not be ready until a week on Monday, to which Mr Justice Gray said: "I'm a bit surprised to put it mildly", and asked if he was applying for an adjournment of six and a half days.

Mr Thwaites for the defence said: "Anyone witnessing this case would find their opinion of the law reaching new depths... This case has taken ten years to come to trial and I'm instructed by my client to press on... This is no Times Newspapers and everybody's futures could be in jeopardy." Mr Justice Gray ruled that the cross-examination of Mr Woolf would commence the following Tuesday.



Mr Thwaites began his opening speech for the defendant: "This case is about a professional man who like many others found himself looking down the twin barrels of bankruptcy and professional humiliation and attempted to save himself by sacrificing some of his clients on the altar of grossly excessive charges."

He stated that in the case of 14 of the clients the fees in question amounted to about £50,000, while in the case of the 15th, Mr Edwards, the fees were in excess of £50,000, and said that Mr Condliffe "characteristically told lies to his clients about the level of his charges," adding that as these estimates were spoken rather than written they were harder to prove.

"Some of the ex-clients say that they were told that the fees would be of the order of a couple of hundred pounds. Fees they were expecting to pay, had paid in the past, and would pay in the future, and fees that were affordable, because these were all little people with the possible exception of Edwards." He said that they had not expected "five star" treatment, and added that Mr Condliffe had failed in his obligation to inform little people what is going to happen at the outset. "This is not a question of etiquette, of professional ethics, this is a question of necessity for any professional man of integrity," said Mr Thwaites, stating that if the firm had found that work was becoming expensive for a client, "an honest man would write to the client and say we have found a lot of work to do and run up a bill of £500, then the client could call a halt."

Referring to the report by the expert witness for the defence, Mr Woolf, he said: "The people were described by Mr Woolf in his report in these terms. The vast majority operated small or very small businesses which if profitable at all were only making a small profit. They were in a parlous financial position permanently teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. Many of the businesses failed during the period in which their financial affairs were dealt with by the claimant's firm, or shortly thereafter."

When clients showed resistance to the level of their bills, Mr Condliffe would threaten them with legal action, said Mr Thwaites, describing the claimant as: "A man who's a bully and will when challenged fight back by every means at his disposal, forcing people to pay up when his charges were grossly excessive to the point of being dishonest."

On Tuesday 9 October Mr Shaw began his cross-examination of *Private Eye's* first witness, expert accountant Mr Emile Woolf, who prepared a report on the case dated 7 September 2001. Mr Shaw said that as Mr Woolf said in his report that "fees charged appear to be excessive" and as there was no dispute about Mr Condliffe's hourly charge out rate: "It must therefore be about the hours Mr Condliffe and others at Condliffe Hilton worked". Mr Woolf replied that he did not necessarily agree with this statement, because Mr Shaw had assumed those hours had actually been worked: "It may be the case that the work was done, but it may be that it was not done."

Mr Shaw asked: "When you see a contemporary diary entry in Mr Condliffe's hand recording or purporting to record spending an hour of his time dealing with the affairs of a particular client, why won't you accept it?" Mr Woolf replied: "For the purposes of my report I did accept it as a starting point but the fees appeared to me to be so grossly excessive and a huge proportion referred to the claimant's own time that it raises doubts in my mind as to whether all the time was actually spent."

Mr Shaw then began to deal with the cases of individual clients in detail. He started with Mr and Mrs Balkwill. Peter Balkwill ran a television production company, Wordsmith Productions Ltd.

Mr. Shaw questioned Mr Woolf about various versions of a "typed time summary" realting to the Balkwills' account. Mr Woolf maintained that the had been duplication but even if it was taken into account the total number of hours worked fell far short of the £10,825 Mr Balkwills had been billed for.

Mr Shaw also questioned Mr Woolf at length about the work done by Condliffe Hilton for Mr Gordon, who ran a newly established upholstery business, and Mrs Gordon who ran a small market research business. He said that Mr Gordon's case was unusual because Mr Condliffe had admitted giving an initial estimate of £100-150 for Mr Gordon plus £50 for Mrs Gordon, but added that it was for tax computations alone. In January 1991 Mr and Mrs Gordon received a bill for £1,525.

Mr Shaw then referred to specific examples from the Gordons' working papers to show that Mr Brian Lewis, the senior accountant's assistant at Condliffe Hilton, had done considerably more work on the Gordons' accounts than mere tax computation. Mr Woolf maintained the view expressed in his report that Mr Lewis had done far more work than was necessary and that the charge was excessive. Mr Shaw said that the claimant's expert accountant had found the charges to be reasonable. When Mr Shaw had completed his cross-examination on the subject of the Gordons, Mr Thwaites stood up and said that he had been waiting all afternoon to hear how it was that Mr Condliffe himself had spent 16½ hours on the Gordons' accounts.

Mr Shaw replied that as the typed time records for the Gordons matched Mr Condliffe's diary entries, it was his belief that the claimant had done the 16½ hours work in question. He asked Mr Woolf for his opinion, who replied: "I find that amount of time astonishing for that kind of business".

The case continues.

EYE TV

Dressed To Kill - The Jane Andrews Story
The Real Cherie Blair
Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster
(All Channel 4)

AS Michael Jackson prepares to say goodbye to Channel 4, his network increasingly resembles *Hello!* One of the first tasks for his successor will be to look at the documentary output. Does it really fit the channel's history and remit to fill factual peak-time slots — as has happened in the last fortnight — with ropey profiles of Jane Andrews, Cherie Blair and Freddie Starr?

The first two films were classic examples of television's arrogant refusal to accept the answer no. In theatre, there is a scrupulously observed superstition against putting on productions of *Hamlet* without the prince. The Channel 4 documentary department, though, thinks nothing of proceeding without the central characters.

Take **Dressed To Kill**, the profile of Jane Andrews who worked for the Duchess Of York, was sacked and then did her boyfriend in when he prevaricated over a ring. Andrews, being in jail, was herself barred from appearing but it also immediately became clear that the Duchess of York had refused to talk, while members of both Andrews' family and her victim's had declined.

Some producers would have stopped the project in these circumstances but this film had proceeded, projecting distant acquaintances and pretty pictures on to the wall of silence. It might seem odd to have compared this documentary to *Hello!* magazine as the material is clearly potentially darker. But, perhaps in an effort to attract upmarket advertisers, the programme's main interest in Andrews seemed to be not that she had killed but that she was toff totty who had killed. Assorted Sloanes remembered her life of "Polo and Proms" and how she initially appeared "a lovely girl who had landed a super job".

There was one remarkable image — a friend had once found Andrews "blow-drying Fergie's armpits", apparently all part of her royal duties — but the rest of the film included nothing that wasn't printed in the newspapers in the days after the trial several months ago. Frequent shots of Buckingham Palace tried to suggest that Andrews was more important than she was but could not disguise the truth that she was a lackey to a semi-detached royal who isn't an HRH anymore.

The Real Cherie Blair was another *Hamlet*-without-prince film from the same channel. In newspapers, it need not matter if the subject refuses to take part.

"It's a compilation of highlights from the best compilation programmes"

Cuttings can be elegantly rewritten and edge can be added with roasting quotations from "a former friend" or "an ex-colleague". Neither of these techniques transfers to television.

The Real Cherie Blair, however, proceeded even though Ms Booth and all her close friends and family had refused to face the camera. Because the Channel 4 deputy chairman Barry Cox, a friend of Tony's, had reportedly telephoned executives for a chat about the programme, the show had been spun in advance as some kind of censorship issue. In fact, the problem wasn't that the programme had been nobbled. The difficulty was that it was cobblers.

The documentary began with the production team being prevented from questioning Cherie in public. The implication was that this was state control of the media. The voiceover sanctimoniously continued: "They may not want to answer the questions but they remain — just who is Britain's first lady?"

The suggestion that there's anything sinister in Cherie's general silence could only be made by someone who believed that public figures — even those famous merely by relation — have a general obligation to speak to the media. The programme's argument was that Downing Street daren't let Cherie speak in case we realise how deep is her influence on Tony's policies.

Actually, the true story is probably more interesting. As with Bill and Hillary, it's a fairly open secret in Labour circles that Cherie's politics are far to the left of her husband's. This makes it a more interesting marriage but the revelation that a political wife isn't a power behind the throne would make a less promotable programme.

Short of anyone in the know, the show relied on people so far from any meaningful access that they should strictly be referred to as hangers-off. An old bag called Cherie — who had inspired Mrs B's parents in their baptism of her — expressed bitterness that she had not been more grateful in fame. An old teacher thought that young Cherie had possibly been off school for a bit when her parents got divorced although she couldn't be sure about that.

Channel 4's other recent *Hello!*-show — **Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster** — at least had an interview with the subject. But, in this case, that was the problem. Starr is one of those self-consciously wacky performers – Barrymore's another — who can just about keep up the pretence in an interview. It's the therapists, the wives and people met late-night in bars who see the darker truths only hinted at here.

Still, television got one gruesome moment which would never have worked in a newspaper interview. Starr threw the producer in the swimming pool, wetting her tee-shirt. "Close up on her nipples," he ordered. "Look at the nipples stick out. Mummy, mummy, I want feeding!" What is happening to C4? The new broom needs to come in with a big brush.

'Square Eyes'

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In which 1949 Ealing comedy film does Alec Guinness play all eight members of the D'Ascoyne family?

Contestant: *The Dirty Dozen.*

See Hear, BBC2

Lara Crooks: What is the most abundant gas in the atmosphere?

Contestant: Air.

Fifteen-To-One, Channel 4

William G Stewart: Now think carefully before you answer this. Where did Alexander the Great come from?

Contestant: Belgium.

And Dumb Australia...

Who Wants To Be A Millionaire, Australia

Eddie McGuire: What spirit goes into the drink known as a daiquiri?

Contestant: I've never had a fucking daiquiri in my life.

GOING LIVE!

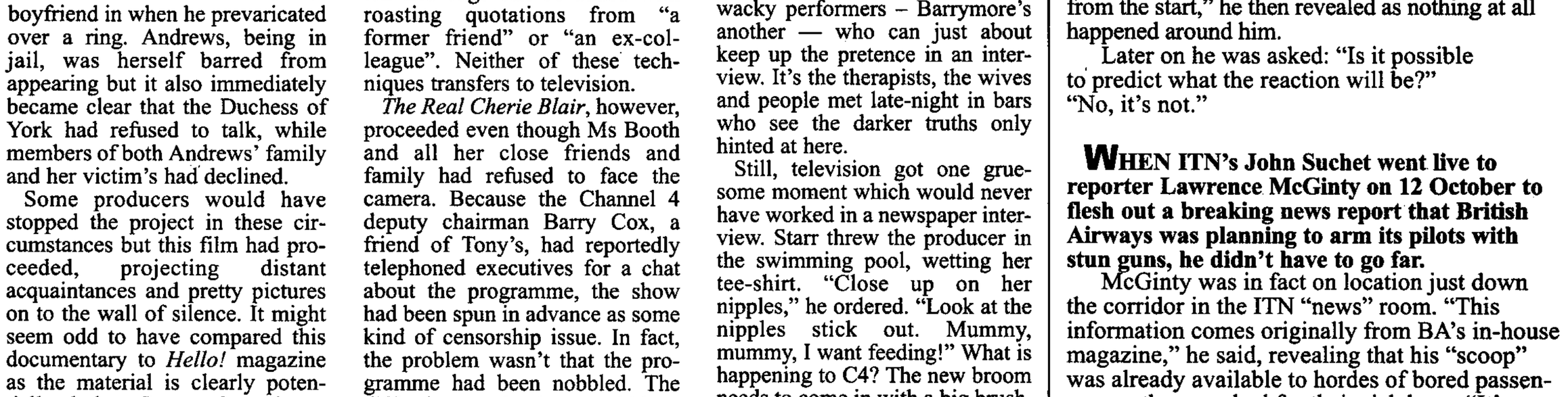
WHEN BBC news went live to Afghanistan on 7 October to cover the US and British air attacks, several reporters were standing in various dark bits of the country reacting to wire copy that was hastily being faxed to them from London.

"We've got no word of further attacks — they'll be happening over there well beyond our sight," said Adam Mynott, until recently a sports hack. "It's clear that when Bush said it will be a sustained attack it will be a sustained attack right from the start," he then revealed as nothing at all happened around him.

Later on he was asked: "Is it possible to predict what the reaction will be?"
"No, it's not."

WHEN ITN's John Suchet went live to reporter Lawrence McGinty on 12 October to flesh out a breaking news report that British Airways was planning to arm its pilots with stun guns, he didn't have to go far.

McGinty was in fact on location just down the corridor in the ITN "news" room. "This information comes originally from BA's in-house magazine," he said, revealing that his "scoop" was already available to hordes of bored passengers as they reached for their sick bags. "It's being considered but it's not a plan," was his devastating conclusion.


Changing rooms
YES, ANOTHER SHOW...
WHERE WE GO INTO A HOUSE...
SLAP A LOT OF NEW EMULSION ON...
AND THE BBC PAY ME A FORTUNE...
TO LET YOU WATCH PAINT DRY!
BBC CONTRACT
Pay CAROL SMILLIE to appear in everything
Ken Pyne

Plugged In

My favourite possession: "I'd be lost without Sky TV! We have just moved into a new house and I never stop watching it, my girlfriend will just have to get used to it.

"I just watch any sport, anything, on the three sports channels, anything from ten pin bowling to the football. I would sit and watch all day if I could, any sport."

KEVIN FOTHERINGHAM
The Sun (Scotland)

Nominated by David Petrie

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

MEDIA NEWS

AFTER years of wondering what to do with their "chief news correspondent" Kate Adie, BBC bosses had almost succeeded in corralling her into the studio of the radio programme *From Our Own Correspondent*. But occasionally she escapes.

Kate was one of the charter-planeload of hacks which flew to New York after the World Trade Centre attack, but with instructions to confine her talents to the TV programme *Correspondent*. Unfortunately for her, the show's editors had in mind a lengthy report consisting only of "actuality" — ie with no narrative and no reporter. Adie was instructed to go into the streets of New York and conduct vox pops with any passer-by who might be an Arab.

Understandably reluctant to undertake such a lowly task, she was promptly told that her services were not required in America and sent back to London — where her bosses had prepared the perfect sop for her. She was despatched to join "our boys" in Oman, on what BBC executives assumed was a basically un-newsworthy military exercise which would keep her out of sight for the next couple of weeks.

Alas! Within days of her arrival Adie was engaged in a furious row with 10 Downing Street spin-doctors, her picture was all over the tabloid front pages — and Kate-hating BBC wallahs were once again nursing treble-headaches all round.

AD NAUSEAM

IT MUST be Christmas. Or spring. Or just about any other time because, ho-hum, here comes another batch of those clever *Economist* adverts to baffle and bemuse us until the next lot appears.

The new poster run is part of an ongoing campaign that's swung deftly from being elegantly entertaining to stomach-churningly smug in the space of two years. The principle is: take red poster with white letters, add a titter's worth of wit or wordplay, receive meaningless advertising award because all other posters are even worse and then repeat until joke wears very, very thin.

It's a timeless formula that's worked for years because it assumes potential *Economist* readers get a kick out of engaging with the quippery. But that in turn does require that the *Economist* advert writers are capable of coining a decent line in the first place.

Against which we offer as evidence the latest pisspoor ciphers: a large "B" with a musical " # " sign, which, if one is clever enough to be an *Economist* reader, must mean "Be sharp". Next up is "Cures itchy scalps" (Head-scratching, geddit?) And then there's "You are the strongest link. Hello", which requires no further comment.

Except from Economist Towers on St James Street, that is, where it seems the marketing managers are getting pretty fed up with those clever clogs at Abbott Mead Vickers. AMV will, however, brook no dissent over its masterful campaign from the people who pay for the posters. Will the *Economist* now B# enough to tell the "creatives" it's time to try something new?

● **WHILE with Abbott Mead Vickers, yet more lies on from their client BT, whose main line of communication seems to be with the Advertising Standards Authority at the moment.**

BT Cellnet recently sent out a mailshot offering "access to the Mobile Internet FREE" stating "FREE minutes can be used by keying +447712927927 in the UK and abroad." Another fabulous offer but, alas, again, not true. Miffed customers taking up the deal soon found they were charged for internet access from abroad. All BT advertising now comes with a free pinch of salt.

● **THE latest McDonalds TV campaign raises an issue the burger giant might be better advised to avoid.**

A voiceover saying "This is how long it takes a plumber to earn enough to buy two cheeseburgers" is followed by a two-second clip of a plumber studying a water pipe and sucking air through his teeth. This is then followed by the "Two cheeseburgers for 99p" close. There's also one featuring an estate agent.

Presumably McDonald's won't do one showing how long it takes one of their own employees to earn enough to buy two cheeseburgers, since the ad would be 15 minutes long.

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Tom & Geri Halliwell

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE London Symphony is Britain's most successful orchestra in every sense, artistic and financial; but so many triumphs seem to have turned the head of its chief executive Clive Gillinson who, nice man that he is, has begun to behave as though he were running an ad agency rather than an arts organisation.

Last week members of the press were invited to "share the LSO's vision for the future", as the invitation said, at an elegant event in Merchant Taylor's Hall. And what a vision it turned out to be: one of high-tech innovation, in-house TV studio facilities, etc, all presented with much talk of "branding", "company culture" and the orchestra's new logo which transforms the letters LSO into the likeness of a pair of breasts. That its current posters show a female torso in a state of undress only adds to this unfortunate resemblance.

But the *pièce de résistance* came with the announcement that the LSO has licensed its breasts (*surely its "trademark"? Ed*) to Itochu Fashion Systems, a company in Japan that will be launching "LSO branded products", including a quality luggage range. Available by Christmas.

Whether music still counts as an "LSO branded product" was barely discussed, although there was brave talk about the new acoustic refit in the Barbican Hall, installed by the City at the orchestra's prompting and a cost of some £6m.

"All the players love it," Gillinson enthused, apparently oblivious to the fact that most of the audience don't. It depends where you sit: in a depressingly large number of seats the sound is now worse than before.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

O·B·N

In the aftermath of the terrible attacks on America, Tony Blair has proved what a great statesman he is.

Just as he did when he expressed the sorrow of the nation after Princess Diana died when he had been Prime Minister for just three months.

Thank God we have such a great leader. And what a fine example he sets with his lovely wife and four beautiful children, bringing family values and marriage back to the fore.

Letter to the Daily Mail

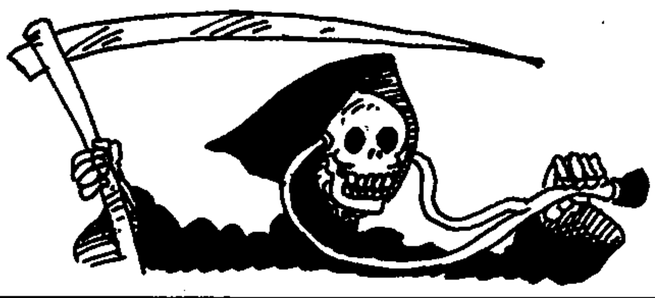
Nominated by J. James.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

MODELS MODELS MODELS
HI, WE'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO MODEL OUR NEW 'WONDERBUM' TIGHTS... ...PREFERABLY SOMEONE WITH A NICELY-SHAPED BUM...
ERM... THIS IS A MODEL AGENCY!
OH... SORRY... ...MUST'VE DIALLED THE WRONG NUMBER!



DOING THE ROUNDS

Kennedy cocks up

THE most alarming conclusion of July's Bristol inquiry report, chaired by Professor Ian Kennedy, is that there is nothing in place in the NHS to ensure it couldn't happen again.

"New" Labour would doubtless quote the plethora of new bodies and safety systems set up to monitor the quality of care. But there are still huge gaps in "meaningful outcome data", and even where it exists most specialties don't have the clear death or glory end-points of heart surgery.

There are very few operations where an analysis of the figures could give statistically and legally robust evidence of poor performance. In Bristol, for example, it has taken a £14m inquiry and two years of mathematical drooling to conclude that a third of all children who underwent heart surgery between 1984 and 1995 received "less than adequate care". Hardly a rapid response.

The best hope of swift action to prevent future tragedy is to protect those at the coal-face observing the process, rather than waiting 17 years to analyse the outcomes. Most theatre sisters and anaesthetists know perfectly well if a surgeon is out of his depth and can spot a pattern emerging far quicker than any audit.

Steve Bolsin knew all was not well in Bristol soon after his appointment when he observed how much longer the operations took than at other centres. And the longer babies and children are on heart bypass, the higher the mortality is bound to be because of the increased risk of multi-organ failure.

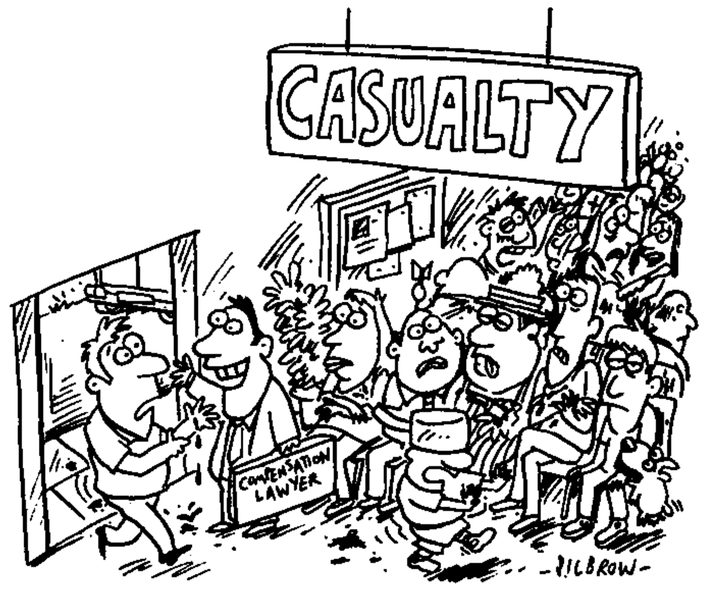
In an ideal NHS this in itself should have been enough for him to raise his concerns and justify a swift and independent assessment of the quality of care. Indeed the public interest disclosure act (PIDA), which became law in July last year, gives legal protection to any employee who raises an "honest and reasonable" suspicion that serious malpractice has occurred. This can be made internally, to ministers, regulators and even to the media where reasonable. Any genuine whistleblower victimised or dismissed as a result can seek unlimited compensation from an employment tribunal.

It is the PIDA's whistleblower protection, then, rather than the health department's systems analysis fixation, that is most likely to prevent future Bristols because the errors are ultimately human, and the doctors and managers in positions of power are masters at working any system to their own advantage. Yet, the Bristol inquiry has reached the extraordinary conclusion that, had Steve Bolsin raised his concerns today, he still wouldn't have been protected. This, despite the fact that the inquiry acknowledged that Bolsin's concerns were genuine, that the path he followed was "understandable" and that "while his actions may not have been the wisest, he persisted and was right to do so". Health secretary Alan Milburn even told the Commons the NHS owed him "a debt of gratitude".

The inquiry's message – that there is still nothing in law to protect future Bolsins from persecution – is potentially very damaging to the NHS and beyond. And it's completely wrong, according to the attorney general, the DTI, the legal advice agency Public Concern at Work and department of health lawyers. Kennedy has refused to comment on this, other than to say he was acting on legal advice at the time; but it seems the most expensive and time-consuming public inquiry in medical history, chaired by a professor of law, has got it badly wrong.

● **HEALTH visitors look set to be erased from the NHS.**

New legislation regulating the nursing professions and due to come on the statute books when parliament returns fails to record the country's 15,000 health visitors as a specialist category. Health visitors say the legislation paves the way for their replacement by less skilled, less autonomous "community nurses".



"We guarantee to see you within one minute of arrival"

From humble beginnings in 1896, the health visitor is now a highly trained nurse who goes to every house where there is a new-born advising on everything from nappy rash and immunisation to post-natal depression, isolation and the effects of poverty.

Their work in preventative care became a role model for health provision around the globe. But for the last four years health visitors have been battling for survival against financially-pressed health authorities and trusts. They have also been fighting a rear-guard action against their regular nursing colleagues at the UKCC, who want to bring them under the umbrella of "nursing" – rather than have their own specialty. The specialist training of health visitors has also been cut from 51 to 32 weeks, with child protection, nutrition and mental health – once an essential part of training – barely covered on some training courses.

Even their own trade union, the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA), appears to have sold them down the river. The CPHVA has agreed to the new draft legislation, even though a survey of health visitors showed the overwhelming majority was unhappy with the new legislation. Health visitors have now reported the CPHVA to the trade union regulator for apparently "contravening" its own rules.

M.D.

DOWN ON THE FARM

IT WAS clever of Devon county council to stage its own "not the foot-and-mouth" inquiry, by way of showing how little faith it has that the three "pseudo-inquiries" set up by the Beloved Leader will do anything to expose just what a catastrophic shambles the BL and his friends have made of the whole affair.

Immediately the Exeter inquiry, chaired by Professor Ian Mercer, homed in on a key reason the government had made the epidemic so much worse than it need have been, when local NFU chairman David Hill lashed out at the grotesque "contiguous cull" policy. "The people who dreamed up the contiguous cull," he said, "were mathematicians and statisticians who produced a computer model. It led to the unnecessary killing of a huge number of animals and caused extreme personal distress."

It is, of course, precisely the need to defend this particular blunder which above all explains why the Beloved Leader cannot afford to hold a genuine public inquiry into the FMD crisis. Because it was the BL who personally handed over control of the crisis back in March to his chief scientist, Prof David King (or "Dave" as the Defra website calls him). It was King who, on the advice of his friend, Prof Sir John Krebs of the Food Standards Agency, appointed Krebs's former Oxford colleague Prof Roy Anderson as his chief adviser on how the crisis should be run. And it was Anderson and his Imperial College statisticians who came up with the infamous "contiguous cull", which has led to hundreds of thousands of acres of Devon now being empty of sheep and cattle.

One curious little puzzle the Devon inquiry may not feel qualified to look into is just how Prof Anderson and his team came to be involved in the FMD crisis in the first place. After all, their speciality was not animal diseases but the epidemiology of human diseases, such as malaria and Aids. They only set up at Imperial College last November after Prof Anderson had been forced to resign his chair at Oxford under various clouds. Yet, when the FMD epidemic broke out in February, they were immediately in a position to set up a computer model to provide advice on how it should be handled. This was because, only four months earlier, one of Anderson's colleagues, Dr Christl Donnelly, had produced a paper on previous FMD epidemics, even though the disease had not seriously affected Britain for 30 years.

The paper was way outside the team's normal remit. But when FMD appeared in February, it put the Anderson team in pole position to offer advice. Was the timing of Dr Donnelly's paper really just a happy accident? Or could the Anderson team somehow have picked up the possibility that an FMD crisis might be on the way?

● LITTLE wonder the government made such a hash of foot-and-mouth. According to the Daily Post, when a farmer in Monmouth applied for a licence to move a bull recently, agriculture officials asked him if the animal was male or female.

This prompted the farmer's Welsh assembly representative David Davies to send a copy of the Ladybird book Fun on the Farm to Margaret Beckett, the rural affairs secretary. "I hope this is not too advanced for the likes of Margaret Beckett, who seems to think the countryside exists purely for townies to enjoy weekend breaks and caravan holidays," said Davies.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

Down on the Fish Farm

ADVICE in *Eye* 1036 warning shellfish aficionados to be cautious before scoffing these delicacies proved horribly prescient. At the end of September diners at a number of UK restaurants complained of nausea, sickness and diarrhoea after eating mussels supplied by the Scottish shellfish marketing group (SSMG).

SSMG supplies the "UK's leading supermarkets and catering establishments..." and owns the Mussel Inn restaurants in Edinburgh and Glasgow where diners also reported sick. SSMG has confirmed that two tonnes of their mussels (about 70,000 mouthfuls) were contaminated by diarrhetic shellfish poisoning. Fifty percent of the consignment was recalled or dumped.

The mussels came from north-west Sutherland, which is deeply embarrassing for Sir John Krebs' Food Standards Agency (FSA). The FSA is responsible for monitoring algal outbreaks and had reported that north-west Sutherland was "clear" of toxic blooms.

FSA spokesman Jeff Moon said: "FSA has a monitoring role to see when particular sea areas need to be closed, but it is not fail-safe. The onus is on the industry to carry out end product testing." But SSMG chairman Walter Speirs complained his industry "had no routes for us to do our own testing." Happy dining!

Meanwhile Ross Finny, the Scottish executive's (SE) environment head-honcho, froths about preserving a pristine aquatic environment while turning a blind eye to the fish farm filth that has brought the shellfish industry to its present straits.

'Old Trout'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SEE YOU, JAMMY

THE galloping privatisation of public services under "new" Labour has led to some terrific opportunities for... crooks.

Big private companies involved in public projects such as schools and hospitals sub-contract jobs to smaller firms offering the most competitive prices. And if those smaller firms happen to be a front for drug dealers, killers and thugs? Well, there's not a lot the solid citizen can do about his or her taxes ending up in their pockets.

In Scotland in particular many private "security" companies are run by criminals, and one of the principal sources of work for such firms is public-private "partnership" projects.

Glasgow's schools are undergoing a £220m building and refurbishment programme run by the 3Ed consortium, which consists of Halifax plc, Miller construction and gravel company turned education experts Amey (*Eyes passim*). They are refurbishing 18 schools and building 11 new ones.

Last month Glasgow's *Sunday Mail* reported that the contract to guard the city's revamped Springburn Academy had gone to M&M Security, one of whose partners, Paul McGovern, was jailed for the murder in 1990 of Thomas Cushley — a caretaker at Springburn Academy. Glasgow city council said that as the schools project was privately funded, the hiring of security firms was "a matter for the contractors".

Several other schools in the refurbishment programme "protected" by private security firms have reported largescale thefts of equipment such as computers, camcorders, televisions and stereos. One, Shawlands Academy, has suffered losses of more than £36,000 and staff have been told to take whatever equipment they can home over half-term for safe-keeping.

East Renfrewshire council is spending £5.2m on new council offices and is involved in a £10m public-private partnership for two primary schools. Security at the sites has been provided by Guardion [*sic*], a firm owned by ex-policeman Paul Johnston, who was kicked out of the force in 1997 after being jailed for fraud. Guardion employees have been involved in several violent clashes with rival firms in the past two years. Others have been jailed for making death threats and for serious drug offences.

A spokesman for East Renfrewshire council told the *Eye*: "We have seen reports about these firms, but at the moment the new council offices site is the property of Kier Scotland construction and the security on it is up to them." Kier's spokeswoman said: "We employed this company in good faith. We are looking into the disturbing information you have provided."

● MYSTERY deepens about the whereabouts of East Staffordshire Labour councillors Dennis Heptonstall and Penny Perry, who resigned as leader and deputy respectively and disappeared on an "extended holiday" in September. The only light new Labour leader Julian Mott can throw on the matter is that the couple, who are married, but not to each other, had "jumped in a camper van and headed for Dover". Council taxpayers are peeved that the pair can be absent from council meetings for six months before their allowances are stopped. There have been "sightings" of the couple in Scotland and France and they have been reported as heading for Bulgaria. Or was that Uganda?

MAYORBALLS

THIS month six more council areas — Brighton and Hove, Hartlepool, Lewisham, Middlesbrough, North Tyneside and Sedgefield — vote in referendums on whether they want directly-elected mayors "to bang heads together" as Labour's Lord Bassam puts it, instead of councillors engaging in fuddy-duddy old debate and compromise.

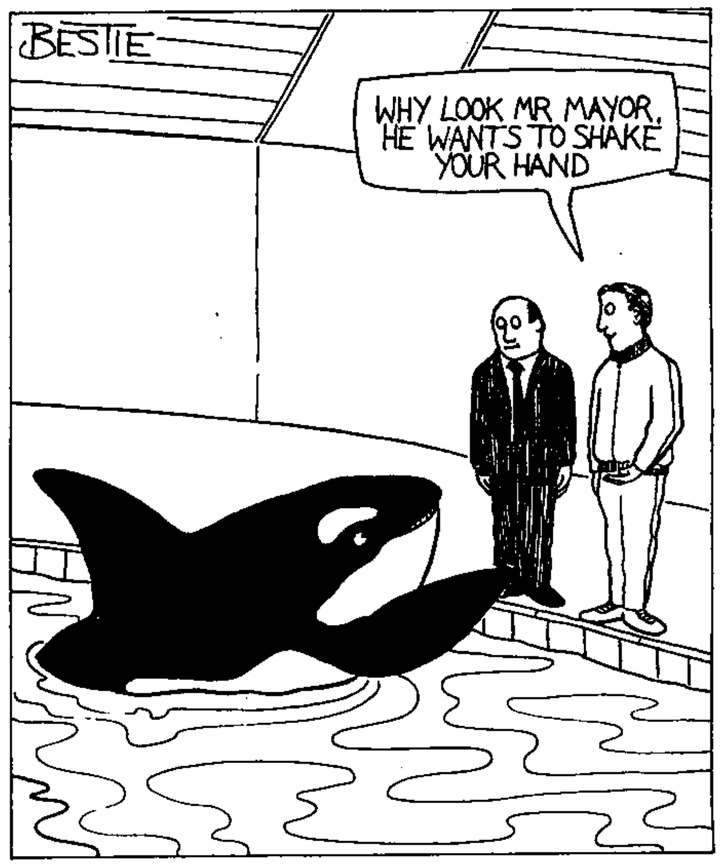
Of the seven completed referendums so far, five have registered emphatic "no" votes (Sunderland, Berwick, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Kirklees), while the ayes had it by a whisker in Watford and more decisively in Doncaster.

Why did Donny go against the grain? Possibly because voters believe nothing could be worse than the crew of crooks and shysters who have graced this column for so many years (21 councillors convicted; four leaders in a row disgraced; some 30 serious criminal trials to come...)

The three local Labour MPs have been quick to back different possible rival candidates to be Doncaster's saviour. Doncaster North's Kevin Hughes knows all about banging heads together – he is a former government whip. He supports current Doncaster council leader Martin Winter, for whom the prospect of a £60,000 salary is an attractive alternative to his career as a "consultant" on various schemes, even though many of them are in the gift of his own council.

Doncaster Central's Rosie Winterton has thrown her weight behind local headmaster Martin Vickers, former secretary of her constituency party and promoted to his current position by a board of governors which coincidentally included members of the same constituency executive. Meanwhile Don Valley MP Caroline Flint is backing former Donny council leader Colin Wedd (*Eyes passim*) who, as reported in the last *Eye*, was fortunate to avoid appearing in court on charges of expenses fiddling. Scandal-diggers would have a field day should he stand for mayor.

So far, so uninspiring. Who else? Former Unison chief Rodney Bickerstaffe, who has a house in the borough, is being touted by some union leaders. One of his most enthusiastic supporters, however, is discredited union man Frank Perks (*Eyes passim*). The smart money is on former rat-catcher and independent councillor Martin Williams, who is offering to do the job for nowt... as he is sitting on £21m in inherited wealth.



FREEMASON WILLY

● THE Yes campaign in Brighton has had a late boost from Labour councillor, *Eye* letters page contributor and Lord Bassam toadie Roy Pennington, who has sent an inspiring email to fellow members of the Labour group. "I will be voting Yes," he writes, "because if local pond-life government democracy cannot hack a mayor and cabinet with integrity and success, then how else will B&H City ever save itself? It is not rocket science, but then who said politics ever was: as Kuhn argued, the only way a scientific paradigm (committee system) is changed is when the old one's [*sic*] die off and there is a quantum leap into the future (a yes vote in the referendum) ... or as Wittgenstein said: there are people who play chess without the king." Will the pseud vote carry the day in Skidrow-on-Sea after all?

I-SPY *Dusseldorf*

Submitted by Robert Goodman. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

FRAUD ATMOSPHERE

HUNDREDS of millions of pounds is being lost to fraudsters because of Labour's failure to achieve one of its favourite catch-phrases, "joined-up government".

The benefit fraud inspectorate (BFI) has been investigating how well the benefits agency (BA) and local authorities (LAs) work together in rooting out fraud from the £96bn paid out annually in benefits by the department of social security and the £13.7bn paid in housing benefit (HB) by local authorities. The answer: not at all well.

There are supposed to be service level agreements (SLAs) governing the swapping of information between the BA and Las. But, according to the BFI, staff pay only "lip service" to them. "On a national level," the report states, "BA counter-fraud staff have no incentive to work closely with LA staff." The BFI also found that the BA and LAs use incompatible computer systems, so that even if the will to exchange information existed it would be hugely cumbersome. When 29 senior managers in the BA were asked what they thought their relationship was like with their local authorities, 25 said it was "good" and only four "poor". The BFI report observed drily: "This perception is undermined by the facts we found."

The cost to taxpayers of all this sniffiness? Around £840m a year in fraud and errors, estimates the BFI.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

ARE YOU SURE LOTTE SHOULD BE PLAYING IN THAT THING, MAX?
IT LOOKS DANGEROUS
I'D NEVER EVEN THOUGHT! ALL THAT JOLTING MUST BE CAUSING ENORMOUS STRESS
TOO RIGHT, THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH PUNISHMENT AN ORIGINAL GEORGIAN DOORFRAME CAN TAKE...

SIGNAL FAILURES

Failtrack

THE government's failure to act sooner to restructure Failtrack has been very costly, and not just in terms of lives lost (Paddington, 1999) or the billions pumped into a floundering company.

Lord Cullen concluded the biggest rail-accident investigation ever held in Britain only last month – and already his expensive report is out of date. The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), meanwhile, has been ordered to publish its long-awaited strategic plan next month. Its draft is predicated on a profit-driven Railtrack being at the centre of the rail system. So this report too may not be worth the paper it is written on.

All of which means further embarrassment for the SRA, which the government formed just 18 months ago and then chose to bypass completely while plotting Railtrack's demise. Transport secretary Stephen Byers enlisted the help of civil servants at the transport department and Ernst & Young, the City firm now administering Railtrack. He clearly thinks though that the Strategic Rail Authority has no place in determining rail strategy.

The government now wants to conduct another giant experiment on the railways, creating a trust to replace Railcrap which is owned by bondholders on fixed returns rather than greedy shareholders. This should relieve some of the financial pressure on maintenance and safety budgets, but the trust will still have to generate a good financial return every year. This model may solve a few problems but dozens of others — including South West Trains, Virgin, Arriva and First Great Western — will continue.

The unnatural split between operators of trains and infrastructure will remain a source of argument and confusion. The use of semi-competent subcontractors to maintain even the most safety-critical infrastructure is likely to continue.

As recently as July Byers ruled out restructuring because the railway needed a period of stability. Now he has realised that the latter is impossible without the former.

The shareholders

FAILTRACK shareholders want their money refunded from Railtrack's assets or by the government or both. In other words, they want to rewrite the rules of gambling on the stock market.

By buying shares they agreed to take the risk of owning the company and knew they could lose most or all of the money they invested. Now they've lost the game they'll even sue to recover the money they chucked into the ante.

They have already succeeded in moving the goalposts more than once. Their company made a catastrophic error of judgement about the cost of upgrading the west-coast line, but the taxpayer stepped in with billions where shareholders would normally have been squeezed hard. The Hatfield accident and its aftermath exposed their company to liabilities so huge that Railtrack and its shareholders should have sunk with all hands — but again the taxpayer stepped in.

When Railtrack declared a £534m loss in May, the rules stated that shareholders should get no dividend. But Railtrack handed them £100m in dividends from funds it didn't possess. In practice, taxpayers took the risks and shareholders reaped the rewards.

Now that Railtrack has a reported £3.3bn debt (some of which is attributable to the dividend payout), the rules say shareholders' capital should be used to pay creditors first and that shareholders should be towards the back of the queue.

As well as complaining about this, shareholders also complained they had no warning their company was going into administration. Er, on which planet have they been living? Railtrack's share price has been falling for three years. In June analysts at brokers ABN Amro said the shares were greatly overpriced and would be worthless if Railtrack's debt continued to rise. Gerald Corbett, the former Railtrack boss, warned in July 2000 that Railtrack was in danger of breaching its banking covenants. Last April Railtrack agreed to have a government-appointed representative on its board; the government's non-appointment of that person was a clue to Railtrack's doom, as the government didn't want to be implicated in the company's failure.

Did the shareholders ignore newspapers which have reported since February that Railtrack was close to bankruptcy — and since December that the government was considering stepping in?

Contributors to pension funds who are in litigious mood have a legitimate grievance if they lose money on Railtrack. They are not required to interpret this mass of signals — they pay other people to do that for them. But no doubt the foolish fund managers who chose to leave millions in Railtrack until it was too late to withdraw will have covered their backsides with armour plating.

Railtrack's shareholders have managed to squeeze £370m – or about 70p a share — out of Byers by threatening court action. He is resisting demands to compensate up to 360p per share. Taxpayers and the travelling public, meanwhile, have no way of clawing back more than £500m (or nearly £1.50 per share) that was channelled from government subsidy into dividends from 1996 to 2001.

PS: Have shareholders forgotten that when Railtrack was floated the government effectively wrote off £800m of debt (*Eye* 972)? That was structured as advance payment for the Thameslink 2000 scheme, due to be finished about now. Railtrack has not started to build it yet.

Steve Marshall

NOBODY has screamed louder about the plight of shareholders than Steve Marshall, who resigned as Railtrack chief executive last week.

Playing for sympathy, he said shareholders included pensioners, staff and ordinary people who just wanted to invest savings for a rainy day. "They are not fat cats," he said.

Obviously his desperation is not related to the fact that he was awarded more than 127,000 Railtrack shares in July, on which he must pay tax. Five other directors gained similar handouts, then worth about £2m. Marshall's non-fat cat salary is about £450,000 a year.

The dominance of people like Marshall — people with no previous experience of railways — helped turn Railtrack pear-shaped and then prevented its recovery. Most of Railtrack's experienced engineers left in despair or were kicked out with the aid of psychometric tests. They were replaced by experts like Marshall, who was parachuted into the upper echelons last year after a career in the electrical and food sectors.

Marshall's biggest gripe is that the government has stopped making massive payments to Railtrack. But the whole point of Railtrack being set up and privatised was that it would not receive money direct from the government. Instead it would have a guaranteed revenue stream from track-access fees paid by train operators — many of whom are themselves heavily subsidised to help meet Railtrack's hefty charges. As those access fees have never stopped pouring in to Railtrack, the state has always met its obligations to Railtrack – as well as responding with generosity when Railtrack's directors cocked up.

The Tories

THE Tories should have kept quiet about Railtrack's spectacular failure. Instead Iain Duncan Smith waded in to the debate to blame deputy prime minister John Prescott and Labour for the chaos.

No one is more culpable for the Railtrack farce than the Tories. They were warned repeatedly that a privatised infrastructure owner which was also the railway's safety authority would be riddled with conflicts of interest. Among those who warned them were worried backbench Tory MPs, who threatened to derail the rail privatisation bill. John Major and his government said Railtrack would remain in public hands, but once the 1993 railways bill became law they set about privatising it.

Having deceived parliament, the Tories then fooled the people who bought shares in the company. Railtrack's prospectus was stuffed with information about the quantity of its assets (remember those rousing TV adverts about 2,500 stations, 40,000 bridges, etc?) but contained little about their quality. The government and the banks which steered the flotation kept quiet about the masses of rotting signal cables (*Eye* 977), which could and should have scared off potential investors.

Railtrack property

IN ALL the wrangling over Railtrack, the cash cow of Railtrack Property has been grazing happily at the verges.

Railtrack Property has valuable land not used for operating trains and development rights to space above major stations. It is not part of Railtrack plc, is not in administration and is not regulated. Unless the two organisations are unified, the rump of the Railtrack group could flog off assets and make it difficult and expensive for Railtrack plc's successor to expand railway capacity.

Railtrack Property also owns about 5 percent of Britain's poster hoardings. Any loss of property or advertising income to the rail network is essentially a loss to the passengers and taxpayers who fund that network.

History could repeat itself. Surplus railway land was divided at privatisation between Railtrack and the rump of BR. The latter sold off its land to the highest bidders, putting it beyond reach for transport use — in which it no longer had any interest. If that situation arises again, "new" Labour is likely to be just as unhelpful as it was when BR sold the last of its family silver (*Eye* 949).

The CBI

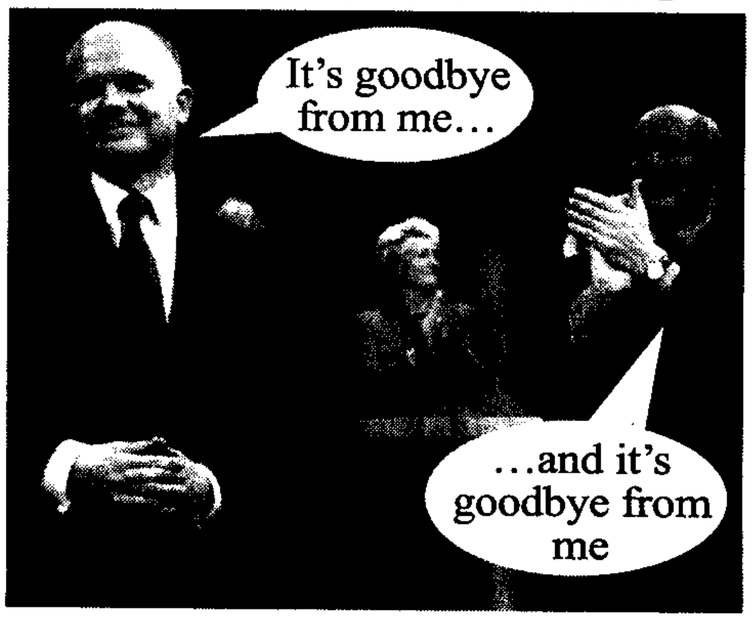
THE captains of private industry are trying to frighten Stephen Byers by telling him he has made a big mistake which will hamper the railways — and "new" Labour — for years to come.

They say it will now be difficult for the rail industry to raise private capital, and the CBI even warned that the Railtrack debacle could hamper Tony Blair's plan for more private-sector involvement in other public services. Tosh.

Anyone with any business acumen knew Railtrack was plagued by unique problems. There is no shortage of consortia for private-finance schemes in health, education, road building and other fields, where there's easy money to be made at minimal risk to the private sector. Even within railways, the rolling-stock leasing companies remain a reliable investment and most of the train-operating companies (Tocs) still churn out fat profits.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE TWO GONNIES



Letters

Anti

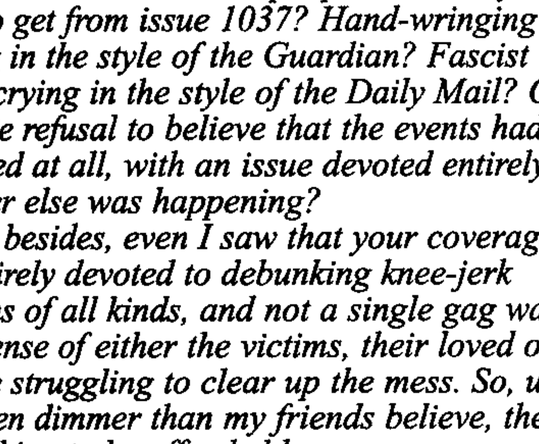
...You should be ashamed of issue 1037. You are obviously not, so cancel my subscription immediately and refund me the balance.
Understand that, you half-wits?
Yours in disgust,
PETER DENNING.

...Following receipt of your issue 1038 I wish to cancel my subscription with immediate effect.
I have been a reader of Private Eye for the past 25 years or even longer, and a subscriber for many of those years. Over this time I have enjoyed the magazine and readily acknowledge it has performed a valuable journalistic role in dealing with a number of high profile figures who think too highly of themselves.
There have been times when I felt items to be in poor taste, but your latest edition, and the grossly insensitive nature of so much of its content, and at a time when the bodies of the innocent victims had not even been recovered, is a step too far.
I think you and whoever else was responsible for the content are truly sick, and should seek some professional help in order to bring you back into a world where there needs to be caring and consideration shown for our fellow human beings. I do not wish to be associated with you or the magazine in future.
R.J. REEVES.

Pro

...I have read Private Eye irregularly for over 20 years now, and yet still the letters page continues to astound me. The latest batch of "outraged" former subscribers beggars belief.
What the hell did these people think they were going to get from issue 1037? Hand-wringing humbug in the style of the Guardian? Fascist bloody crying in the style of the Daily Mail? Or a complete refusal to believe that the events had happened at all, with an issue devoted entirely to whatever else was happening?
And besides, even I saw that your coverage was entirely devoted to debunking knee-jerk reactions of all kinds, and not a single gag was at the expense of either the victims, their loved ones or those struggling to clear up the mess. So, unless I am even dimmer than my friends believe, there was nothing to be offended by.
DENNIS O'NEILL.

...If I had a subscription I would cancel it. However, I am pleased to say, this has nothing to do with your excellent coverage of the events of 11 September — the armageddon joke was practically genius.
The reason for my indignation however is the whinging nature and lack of sense of humour shown by your correspondents. I have no desire to be associated with them in any way.
A. FALSENAME.



"... and in the event of redundancy, leave by the 'Exit' doors here and here..."

...As a veteran of seventy, I have scarcely missed an issue of your organ since number one. I have always applauded every lapse of taste as a welcome antidote to the tons of uncritical drivel churned out by the rest of the press, daily, weekly, yearly.
Keep up the good work.
DR DEREK LEE.

...I was appalled... by the whinging diatribes in this week's Eye against your excellent issue 1037 that contained material on the USA tragedies.
I am looking forward to your special Foot & Mouth Report later in the month, and hope that its conclusions will hasten the demise of a government that is the world's number one for hypocrisy and cant. Let's open a book; which will cost the UK taxpayer the most: the Foot & Mouth catastrophe, or the forthcoming "police action" against international terrorism?
RICHARD ELLIS.

...Having just read the letters of issue 1038 I am writing to say that they have convinced me to subscribe to Eye, this was after I bought issue 1037 because the front cover was an antidote to the rest of the media output since "everything changed" on the horrors of 11 Sept.
"ECVODKA".

Lookalike

Interpreter

Cut-Throat Jake

Sir,
Have any of your readers noticed the similarity between the Taliban Mullah Zaeef's interpreter, and Cut-Throat Jake, the baddie in Captain Pugwash?
Yours faithfully,
CLAIR DENTON,
Bookham, Surrey.

...Due to the unlicensed censorship imposed by my local vendors (WHS), I have been unable to obtain issue 1037. I wonder if the proprietors realise that this policy has much in common with the rule of the Taliban which they claim to abhor.
I will now be taking out a subscription to prevent a recurrence, but am I able to get hold of the sorely missed issue? [Yes. Please email subscriptions@private-eye.co.uk. Ed.]
M. LAZENBY.

...I've been looking back at Eye 1037 and the reporting of the 11 September outrage, but fail to see nauseating and compassionless reporting; the bad satire.
Did you craftily hide articles proclaiming the kamikaze pilots to be valiant freedom fighters? Did I imagine the charming cartoon on a bin Laden like figure handing an acolyte a grenade and saying "I wish I could join you, but I'm needed here on Earth"?...
ALEC GLASGOW.

...I was shocked and appalled that so many ex-Private Eye readers thought they were buying the Daily Mail. Surely the absence of endless why-oh-why columns, and pull-out-'n'-keep disaster photos would have given the game away? Does Mrs Thatcher have an opinion on this?
ALAN MAGRATH.

"Afraid to go anywhere nice for your holidays?"

...I've just got back from a week in the States and I have to tell you that Eye 1038 has saved me from insanity. CNN has persuaded the American people that World War Three is upon them and gas masks are selling fast. In just one week I got caught up in countless renditions of "Proud to be an American" and all the flights I took were almost empty. The world needs perspective not panic if we're to avoid causing more damage to our way of life during the aftermath than was caused by the actual event. Only your organ seems capable of fulfilling this simple journalistic function.
RICH KNIGHT.

...Did I miss something? A terrorist attack occurs in the US. The head of state goes scurrying around the place like a frightened rabbit. He then comes out with some half-assed speech about getting the Vice-President, etc. (ie people who actually seem to know what they're doing) on the job. You summarise this on your cover and people are offended? I give up!
VAUGHAN BIRBECK.

...Re the new Eye (1038), the cover is very funny, the 80s' cartoon collection is excellent, but the Split Personalities picture is sheer brilliance. It alone was worth the cover price. Keep this up and I might even subscribe!
GRAEME INNES-JOHNSTONE.

...I know that your magazine does not approve much of Mr Berlusconi's premiership in Italy, and therefore I was pleasantly surprised that you decided to publish the cartoon on free speech ("Berlusconi speaks" p.17, issue 1038). It is nice to see that you don't let political prejudice come in the way of a good joke or (even!) impartiality. I shall definitely continue to give you my money (but then I do it even when I don't agree with you, because you always make me laugh). I wish we had anything similar to your esteemed organ in Italy.
CECILIA MICHELANGELI.

... Might I just say – Well done!
I found the picture-caption of bin Laden declaring Belfast as a possible refuge particularly to the point. This "War on Terrorism" strap-line really should be rewritten as "War on The Taliban Regime" (which doesn't sound catchy and may not make any sense to rednecks) or "War on Middle Eastern Anti-Semitic Terrorist Organisations that We Armed When Russia Invaded Afghanistan" which, although to the point, is a bit laboured. What happened in New York and (don't forget) in Washington was a horrific example of fanaticism prevailing over humanity. If there are embarrassing, idiotic or even culpably irresponsible incidents and actions surrounding the WTC horror then it is pathetic for the press (of any colour) to avoid them "in the cause of decency". Keep up the good work!
This issue was so good, I'm considering taking out a subscription!
ALAN J. BISHOP.

The other Letters

Private Eye

...I write in disgust as I am clearly receiving a different edition of your organ than that read by the complainants featured in Eye 1038. Nowhere in issue 1037 (despite a closer re-read) could I find any jokes whose butt was a victim of the recent US tragedy.

Is it therefore possible that, as a cheapskate direct debit subscriber, I am sent a more lightweight, toned-down version than those who pay by other means? If so, could you please upgrade my subscription at once to "maximum-offence level" as I am feeling somewhat shortchanged.

RICHARD BLYTHE.

...Congratulations on your latest issue, which is the best for years. Clearly the departure of the sanctimonious twats who cancelled their subscriptions blah blah after 1037 has spurred you on to new heights of creativity. I have been giggling for four days over the Vicar's competition to win one of Mrs Jay's Lemon Drizzle Cakes.

Don't ever, ever stop.

ANDREW DILLING.

...I just wanted to congratulate you on your web site. Since I am currently in China, I can't read my Private Eye, but thanks to it, I was still able to read the outraged letters which you so kindly put up on the site. They gave me and others a laugh, and contained more current events than I've seen in weeks.

A (STILL LAUGHING) SUBSCRIBER.

...In an idle moment I found myself pondering how many of those who had written cancelling their subscriptions after issue 1037 bought 1038 to see if their letters were printed. The majority, I suspect.

G. DAVIES.

● ***That's enough self-congratulatory navel-gazing for one issue – even though the Pro letters did outnumber the Antis by about 100-1. Ed.***

Amin to say

Sir,

Saudi ambassador Ghazi Algosaibi's specious posturing (1038) ignores the short-sighted stupidity of the corrupt Saudi regime. Earlier in the year a series of bombs went off in Saudi Arabia – the response? Parade a few hapless Brits on TV and make them confess to the crimes, destroying any chance of a fair trial! Despite Mr Algosaibi's objection to the term "barbarous", one struggles to think of a more suitable adjective. Had the authorities actually made serious investigations into who was responsible, rather than staging a crude cover-up, who knows how much intelligence concerning Bin Laden's network and his intentions might have been discovered?

On another matter, if Saudi Arabia could revoke Bin Laden's citizenship why doesn't it do the world a favour and hand over a notorious criminal it has been harbouring for years – former Private Eye writer Idi Amin?

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD BARTHOLOMEW,
London E17.

On probation

Sir,

I was surprised to see that Private Eye has been so easily duped into targeting Joe Kuipers as the scapegoat for CAFCASS's woes (In the Back, 1038) No doubt the anonymous, embittered shit who fed your gullible sub-editor a mixture of innuendo, lies and carefully edited extracts is relying on the fact that Joe is constrained from responding to such mud-slinging.

To friends and colleagues of Joe in the Probation Service the idea that he would "walk out" or walk away from any problems in CAFCASS is utterly ridiculous. Over a 20-year period Joe has always set the highest standards for his own conduct and performance, and then worked incessantly to help others achieve the same.

I appreciate that from your viewpoint I'm referring to a column filler in the back pages. Your casual indifference to the impact on a good man's reputation disgusts me. Perhaps next time you should seek some verification before putting your snide mockeries into print.

Yours faithfully,
ROB VOAKES,
Asst Chief Probation Officer, Leeds.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

Richard Keyes: *Well, wasn't that the most nail-biting and dramatic finale?*
Shearer: *Yeah, especially at the end.*
Sky Sports
(Peter Froggatt)

"The midfield picks itself: Beckham, Scholes, Gerrard and A.N. Other."
PHIL NEAL, BBC
(Michael Watson)

"We've dug our bed and we'll lie in it."
AUDLEY HARRISON, BBC
(John Paines)

"Cars with fewer than one occupant will not be allowed into New York."
JOHN BURMAN, ABC News
(Doc Farmer)

"This is the best Man United have played in Europe this season and, conversely, the opposition has been excellent."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(Simon Blackmore)

"We don't talk property prices any more"

Out by miles

Sir,

So, by going to St Andrews University, Prince William is an "Edinburgh fresher" (1038). By the same logic, someone who went to Cambridge University would be a Leicester graduate, and Oxford alumni would find their degrees come from Birmingham. I'm sure no Oxford or Cambridge graduates would be remotely distressed at being described as Leicester or Birmingham alumni, so equally I'm sure that St Andreans would not be distressed at being called Dunedinites. IN YOUR DREAMS, DICKHEAD!! St Andrews is 50 miles from Edinburgh, and in a completely different kingdom.

Geography really isn't that difficult, guys.

COLIN, HELEN & ALEX SHARPLES,
Via e-mail.

Crying Schama

Sir,

You suggest (1038) that the Daily Mirror's resident novelist borrowed from Martin Amis in order to churn out his 6,000 polished words on the New York catastrophe. What tosh! For balance, your organ should know that it was Simon Schama who first "inspired" Parsons.

Schama in the Guardian on 14 September wrote: "It came, literally out of a clear blue sky, one of those eye-poppingly beautiful mornings when you forgive autumn for polishing off summer." Not to be out done, Mirror man Parsons wrote: "Death came out of a clear, blue sky... the kind of clear, blue sky you only get in autumn in New York City. The day was crisp and cloudless and made you feel glad to be alive."

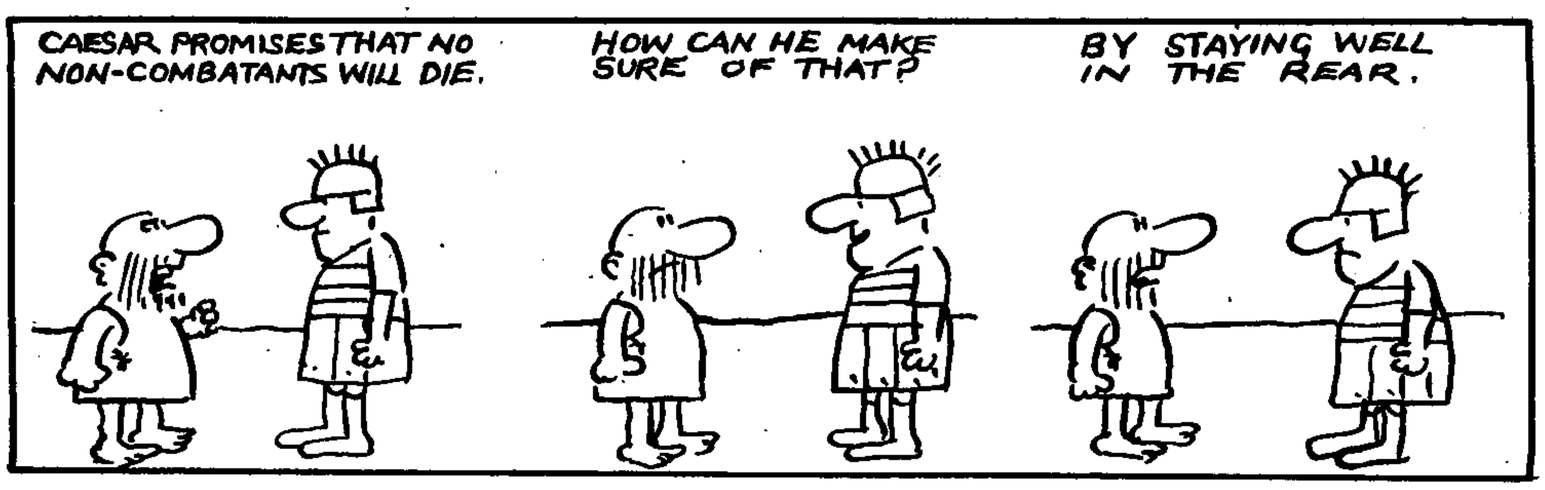
And there was me sleeping more soundly at night, secure in the knowledge that the orthodontically-challenged commando Amis was busy waging his "War against Cliché", proving himself to be the real avant garde. Evidently the limited strike action against these literary terrorists has yet to strike where it hurts.

Time to up the war effort!

Yours,
MARC-EMMANUEL CRONIN,
London N7.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"This institution was founded in 1859," president Bette Landman told reporters in Pennsylvania, "and is one of the oldest women's colleges in the United States. We are very proud of the college's name and traditions, but we realise that times change, and that we have to change with them. That is why Beaver College will henceforth be known as Arcadia University.

"We've known for decades that the name of Beaver College on a framed

diploma would often provoke incredulous laughter, but that's true of a lot of names in this state. The town of Intercourse, for example, often provokes a similar reaction. But what has forced us to change is the way that most of the Internet software now on the market automatically blocks out the college's name when students use their computers to make searches of US campuses. We were losing out badly, and believe that upgrading the school to a university will boost our international recruitment figures. Nowadays we are a co-ed college, and from now on our students, male and female, will be known as Arcadians, and no longer as Beavers." *(AP, 27/8/01. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

AFFIDAVIT OF FLORENCE EMILY COLEMAN

I Florence Emily Coleman née Prigg wish to record the following:

1. The father of my daughter Valerie May Wiles, who was born on the 26 November 1946, was the late Mr George Bean formerly of The Cottages, Rough Common, and not my late husband Mr Herbert Coleman whose name appears as her father on her birth certificate.
2. The father of my daughter Sylvia June Adams, who was born on the 24 June 1948, was the late Mr John 'Jack' Bean formerly of Whitehall, Chartham Hatch, and not my late husband Mr Herbert Coleman whose name appears as her father on her birth certificate.
3. I was full aware that false information was given to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages at the date of the registration of each of my children's births. My late husband was also aware of the situation.

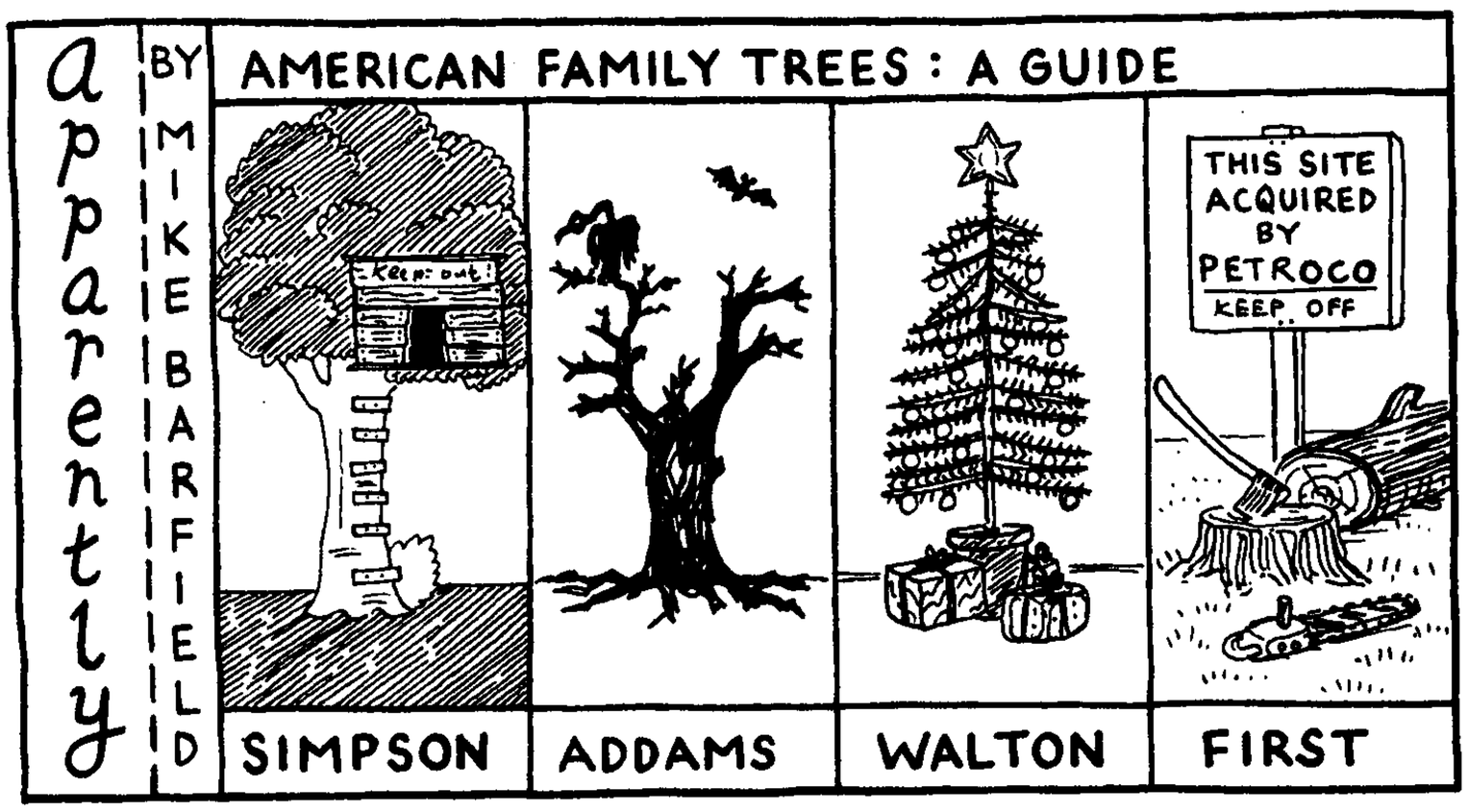
(Kentish Express, 23/8/01. Spotter: P. B. Richley)

— o —

"Is it a crime to sing in lectures?" Professor Henry Mok Tai-kee asked reporters in his office at the Baptist University in Hong Kong. "Singing is a part of my teaching routine, because it helps me create a better and more relaxed atmosphere. Singing during lectures is very common in universities overseas. I have published over twenty books in the past, and I sing for at least forty-five minutes in classes, so I know what I am talking about."

Dr Mok was defending himself after having been suspended as head of the Social Work department, due to complaints about his behaviour during classes. "It's true that I am usually late for class, but only by half an hour or so, and not always even as much as that. And these allegations that I have encouraged students to commit suicide have been grossly exaggerated, and taken out of context. Yes, I've often pointed out the advantages of suicide to them, but I've never actually recommended it. It's their choice, not mine. As for saying that I do not explain course materials properly, why should I? Can't these students read? It's clear to me that they just feel pressurised by my tough academic standards."

Following the appearance of an unprecedented number of complaint letters from students on the university's wall of democracy, Dr Mok remains suspended. (South China Morning Post, 7/9/01. Spotter: Dr George Adams)



ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

NO. 94
TERENCE CONRAN

(This feature was held over from our last issue as it was considered inappropriate to publish it in the light of world circumstances at the time.)

Would you say that spoons had changed a lot in your lifetime?

I don't think young people today can have any conception how provincial and dreary British spoons were in the 50s. It was only in the 60s when we opened Habitat and I introduced Danish, Italian and Swedish spoons to this country that the whole culture of spoons took off.

Do you take credit for changing the face of spoons?

Of course. We did it with deckchairs, sofas, coffee-grinders. We showed that an object could be functional and beautiful at the same time. Our range of stripped-pine spoons sold over 30 million in the first year. For the first time Britain was serious about spoons.

I suppose, as a perfectionist, you take particular care to get the spoons right in all your many restaurants?

I'm currently replacing all the spoons in my restaurants with a very exciting new range by the brilliant young Irish-Japanese designer Brendan Suzuki.

And what are they like, these new spoons?

At first sight they look exactly like the kind of cheap and cheerful spoons you get given in airport buffets. But then, that's the whole point. They're cutting-edge retro. It's the sort of thing I'm famous for. It's up to the customers to keep up.

So, is there a definitive Conran spoon?

Everything I do is definitive. Food, lifestyle, spoons. It's what the world expects from Conran.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Well, actually, yes. When I opened Ripoff in Covent Garden, David Hockney drew a spoon on the tablecloth and…

… you mean 'No'?

NEXT WEEK: Sir Simon Rattle – "Me and My Toaster".

ENIGMA (15)
The new British WWII spy thriller based on Rolf Harris' bestselling book. 1 hr 55

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent (and Padre-in-Chief To The Armed Forces!):
Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

The Paper That Supports Our Bombs!

Oman, Thursday

Salaam! (As we Muslims say!)

As everyone will know by now, I have had to take time off from parish duties to make several missionary tours around the world to spread the gospel of war!

And what an interesting and fascinating experience it has been, to meet people of all faiths, from Father Rasputin K.G.B., of the Russian Very Orthodox Church (affectionately known to his followers as "The Butcher of Grozny") to the Rev. George Dubya Bush Jr, leader of the Church of Latter Day Morons in the USA.

But, of course, my main task of outreach has been to our Muslim brothers and sisters, with whom we share so much!

After all, are we not all the "children of Abraham" – Christians, Jews and Muslims – all fighting together to make a better world?

And let's get one thing clear. This is not a "crusade", as some people have foolishly tried to call it. Goodness me, no!

The days are gone when we in the West would send great armies across the world to slaughter innocent Muslims.

No, that was in the Middle Ages. And some of us, I'm glad to say, don't want to return to the Middle Ages, unlike Mr Bin Laden and his Muslim friends!

There's so much ignorance about Islam, isn't there? Well, let me tell you that I've been re-reading the Koran lately (the Muslim Bible), and I hope that all of you will take a copy home after Evensong next Sunday and spend a few days studying it as I (and Mr Campbell!) have been doing on the way from the airport!

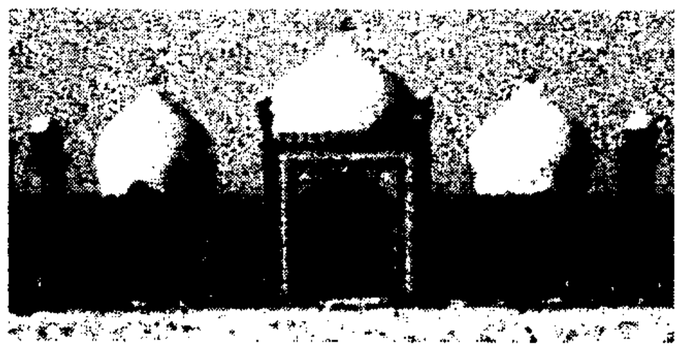
And I can tell you, Islam is not what so many ignorant people believe! Islam is about peace, compassion, loving your neighbour, turning the other cheek, being kind to animals, equal rights for women, democracy, cricket, warm beards *(Surely 'beer'? A.C.)*, old ladies cycling to mosque in the early morning mist.

And, hey, aren't these the things we all believe in? Except of course for the fanatics you find in every religion, particularly Islam!

I have to say I was pretty shocked by the attitude of my Saudi hosts, when they wouldn't even let me into their country, saying that I was an "infidel" and "unclean" and that Mr Campbell and I would pollute their holy places by our presence.

Considering that I had taken the precaution of asking our accountant Mr Levy to stay at home in Israel, and told Cherie that, as a woman, it was her duty to stay at home looking after Leo for a change, I thought we would be made welcome!

In the circumstances, I can only say it



was pretty un-Christian of them to refuse to see me!

But that's precisely the sort of thing I am up against in my tireless crusade to make the world a better, safer place!

All I can say is what a relief it was to address a congregation of our own British troops here in Oman, where I was able to lead them in a rousing chorus of that fine old humn "Let's kick ass"!

As I told them in my sermon, quoting from the Good Book, "Blessed are the lasting peacemakers, for they shall have to make war first, in order to make sure that the peace is in a real sense lasting" *(Book of the Apocalypse)*.

Yours,

Tony

SPECIAL VIDEO OFFER

THE VICAR'S HISTORIC SERMON AT THE BRIGHTON PARISH OUTING

Many parishioners have been asked to ask for a souvenir copy of what everyone agrees was Tony's finest sermon ever.

"THE SERMON ON THE MORAL HIGH GROUND" (PG) is now available in VIDEO and DVD versions from the Vestry at £29.99.

Now you too can thrill once again to Tony's vision of a new world where he sorts everything out – war, injustice, poverty, suffering and the single European currency.

As the organ swells to a climax, the Vicar reaches out to the hearts and minds of everyone – not just those of us in the parish, but the whole family of mankind.

Reviews: *"More inspiring than Gladstone"* (St Albion's Newsletter) *"Better than Churchill"* (A. Campbell) *"Eat your heart out, St Francis of Assisi"* (Alastair Campbell, no relation)

TEXT OF THE WEEK

"Come unto me, all who are Bin Laden, and I will kill you."

Gospel of St Marksman 7.3.

CHANGES TO LITURGY

To mark the emergence of a new world order, since Sept. 11, the following changes have been introduced to the Book of Common Blair.

New Responses:

Vicar: War be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

The congregation shall then offer each other some sign of war (it may be a punch, a slap or a kick in the ass).

Vicar: Go on, punk.

All: Make my day.

VALETE

Ms Margaret McDonut, one of the vicar's most loyal and helpful aides has gone to work for her friend (and mine! T.B.) Mr Desmond, the proprietor of "Dirty Des Adult Mag Emporium". We all wish her well working in Dirty Des's shop, making sure that there are plenty of brown paper bags in which to put Mr Desmond's magazines. Good luck Margaret – we'll see you when it comes to Donation Sunday. T.B.

WOMEN'S GROUPS

MRS Cherie Booth gave a very interesting talk on the subject of ear acupuncture. She told us that a lot of high-flying, successful working mothers experience an abnormal degree of stress in their jobs. She passed round a small "ear needle" which, she explained, could be inserted into the upper lobe of the ear to redistribute the body's life-giving energies. The chairwoman Mrs Jowell thanked the Vicar's wife for giving up her very valuable time to provide such an interesting talk.

"We all feel very energised just by listening to you," said Mrs Jowell, "and we don't even need one of those needles when you're around."

Everyone laughed, and cakes were served by Mrs Short, who reminded the ladies that a lot of poor people in Afghanistan were dying of famine while "you are stuffing your faces with cake".

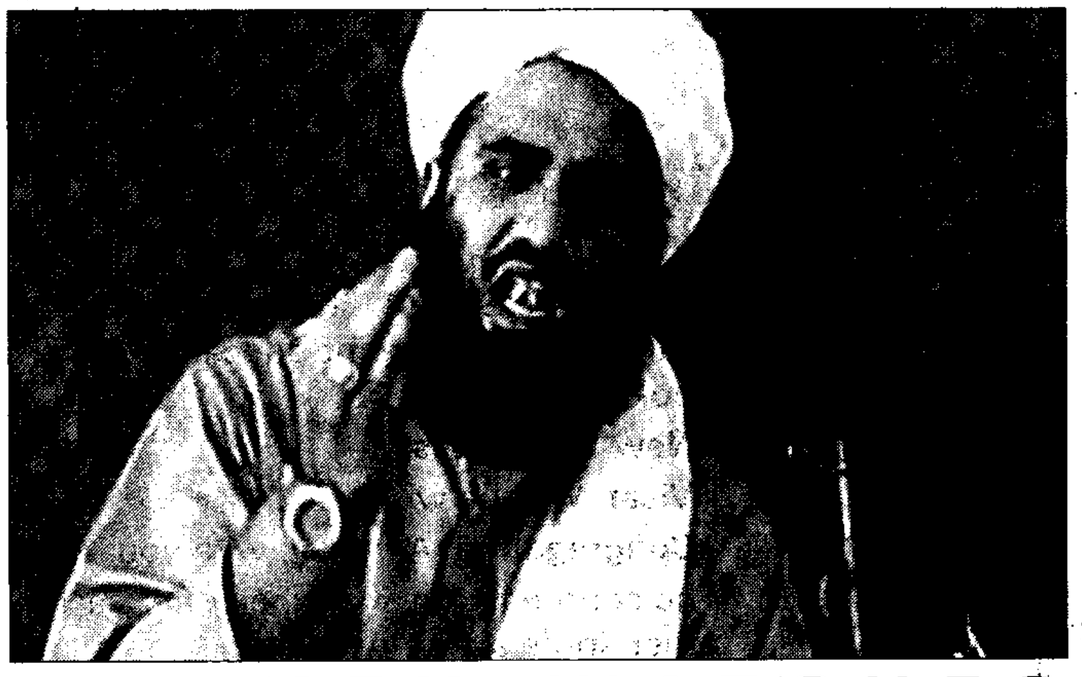
A resolution was passed that Mrs Short should not be invited to meetings of the St Albion's Women's Group again.

Memo To PCC Members From Ms Jo Moore

With everyone's attention focused on the world crisis, now is a good time to announce any items of parish business that might embarrass the PCC - eg, increased expenses for members of the church council.

DO DESTROY THIS E-MAIL AND, WHATEVER YOU DO, DO NOT SEND IT TO THE PARISH MAGAZINE. Jo

Advertisement



GNOMEX WATCHES

A watch says more about you than a thousand words. This high precision timepiece is waterproof, bombproof and missileproof, and accurate to within one hundredth of a millitron.

No wonder top Taliban leaders all wear Gnomex watches. "My Gnomex tells me exactly what the time is" says Sulaiman Abu Ghaith. "It's the twelfth century."

GNOMEX

Geneva – Paris – New York – Kabul

TV HIGHLIGHTS

Edward and Mrs Wessex

The heartbreaking Royal Romance of the good-looking young Prince who is prepared to sacrifice his royal position for the money he loves.

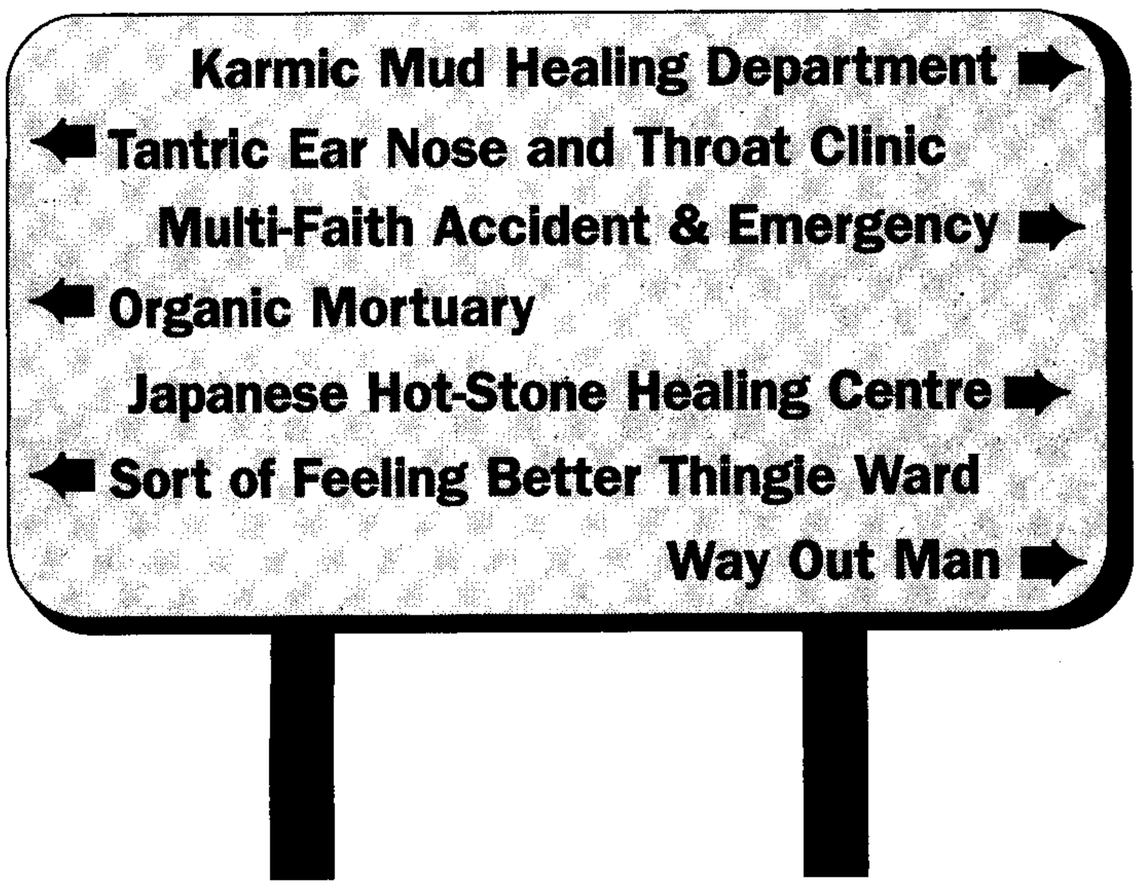
Cast in Full

Edward Windsor	EDWARD FOX
Sophie Rhys Jones	JOANNA LUMLEY
Prince William	JUDE LAW
Queen Mother	THORA HIRD
Duke of Edinburgh	VICTOR MELDREW

● *Plus guest appearance*
MOHAMED FAYED as Himself

Produced by Ardent Television plc

THAT PRINCE CHARLES NEW-LOOK HOSPITAL What You Will See


Karmic Mud Healing Department
Tantric Ear Nose and Throat Clinic
Multi-Faith Accident & Emergency
Organic Mortuary
Japanese Hot-Stone Healing Centre
Sort of Feeling Better Thingie Ward
Way Out Man

GLENDA SLAGG

Fleet Street's Biological Weapon!

● **HATS OFF to feisty Anne Robinson!?!!**

She's opened her soul to the world and made us laugh and weep with her bittersweet memoirs of being a mum, a boozer and the world's biggest-ever TV star!?!

What a role-model for all the women of the world!?!

She's a red-head, red-hot, hard-drinkin', hard-lovin', hard-livin' Mama!?!

***Question:* Who is the strongest link? *Answer:* You are, Annie!! (Geddit?!!)**

● OK, SO SHE drank eight bottles of vodka a day and woke up in some strange bloke's bed covered in vomit?!?! Who hasn't?!

We're not living in Afghanistan, Annie – that's life for all of us gals living in 2001!?!

Stop cashin' in on your drinking, your daughter, and your dreary husbands!?!

Here's a tip from Auntie Glenda (who's been there, done it and been sick on the t-shirt!?!) – Annie, Get Your Gun and shoot yourself!?!

Goodbye!!

● *HATS and everything else off to 93-year-old Joan Collins!?! Let's hear it for a gal who's not afraid to go a-dancin' and a-prancin' in her knickers when she should be in a geriatric ward!?!!*

But what a trouper!?!? They don't make stars like her any more!?!? If we want to win the war in Afghanistan, we should send out our Joanie in her suspenders!?!? And watch the Taliban run for cover!?!?

● TALKING of the Taliban, am I the only one who has got the hots for Osama bin Laden?!? *(No. This piece has been in every other paper. Ed.)*

With his dark brown eyes, silky beard and smile, he's every red-blooded girl's idea of a sexy terrorist leader!?!

OK, so he's responsible for the death of six thousand people in New York, but then love's a crazy thing?!?

Take me into your cave and show me your secret arsenal!?! Geddit!?! That's what I call Biological Phwoarfare!! (Geddit?!?)

The above paragraph has been deemed unhelpful by the Government's D-Notice Committee, and the rest of the column, including Glenda's Men of the Month feature naming Saddam Hussein, Chairman Arafat, and Sulaiman Abu Ghaith ("crazy name, completely crazy guy") as her Ramadan Romeos, has been censored.

Byeeee!!

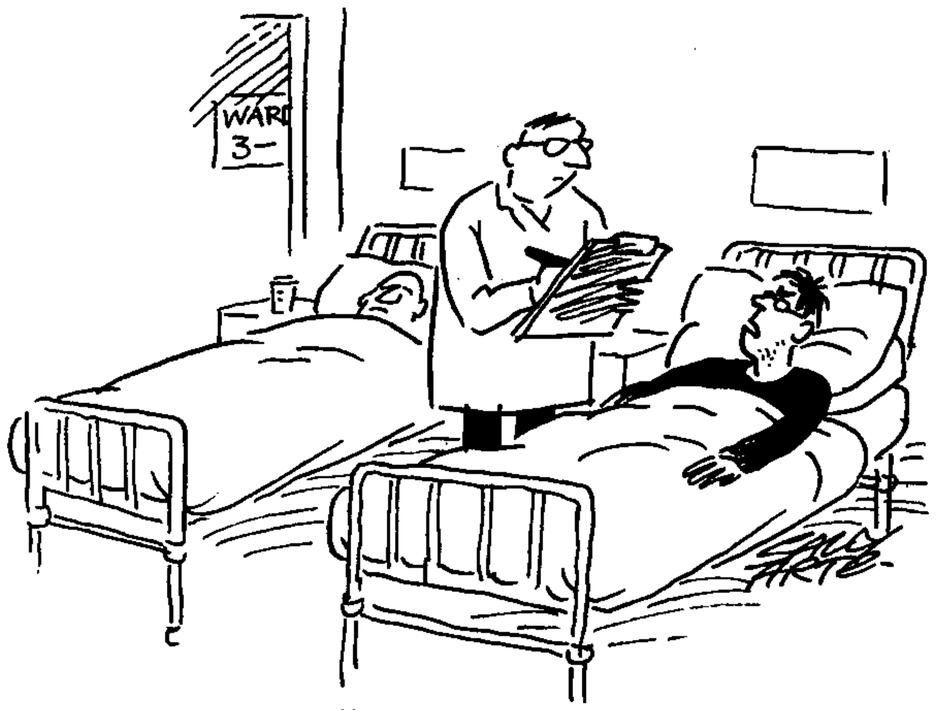
Prince Charles models his new male nurse design

Land of Hope and Glory

(School.s version approved by HM Government)

Oh we do like Muslims
We like them very much
How can we ever tell them
That they really are such
Wonderful people truly
Warm and caring and nice
With their mosques and
their mullahs
And their curry and rice.

(To be sung to original Elgar tune)



*"Actually, I'm **militant** C of E"*

THAT SEVEN-MAN BLAIR WAR CABINET IN FULL

TONY BLAIR Supreme Commander

TONY BLAIR Reporting directly to Tony Blair

TONY BLAIR Liaising directly with Number 10

TONY BLAIR Not answering calls from John Prescott

TONY BLAIR Not answering calls from Jack Straw

TONY BLAIR Liaising directly with the Americans

TONY BLAIR Ignoring Gordon Brown

(That's enough Cabinet. Ed.)

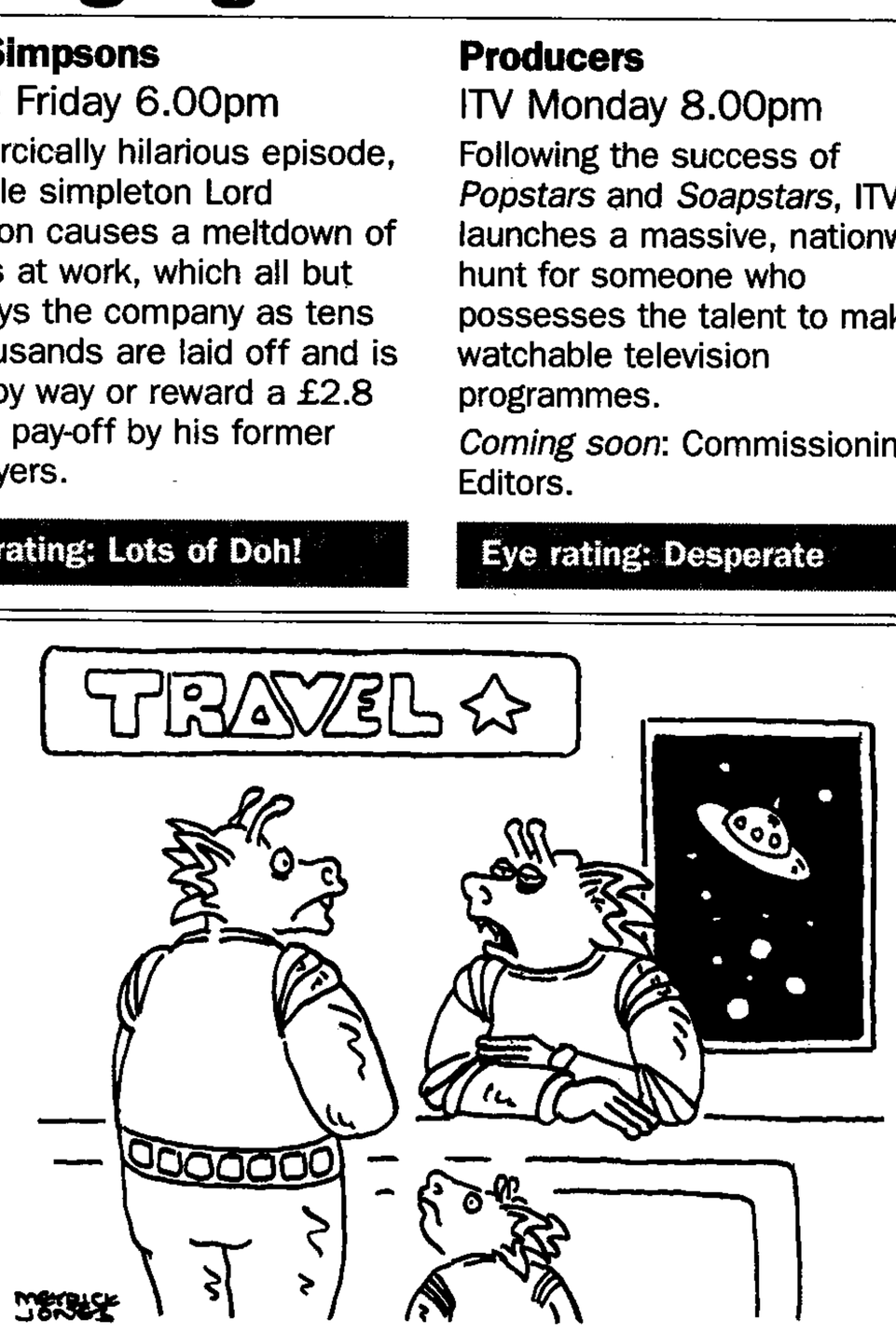
TV Highlights

The Simpsons
BBC2 Friday 6.00pm
In a farcically hilarious episode, loveable simpleton Lord Simpson causes a meltdown of shares at work, which all but destroys the company as tens of thousands are laid off and is given by way or reward a £2.8 million pay-off by his former employers.

Eye rating: Lots of Doh!

Producers
ITV Monday 8.00pm
Following the success of *Popstars* and *Soapstars*, ITV launches a massive, nationwide hunt for someone who possesses the talent to make watchable television programmes.
Coming soon: Commissioning Editors.

Eye rating: Desperate



"To be honest, it's not a very good time to be visiting earth"

That historic Blair speech in full

I'd like to build the world a home and furnish it with love. Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow-white turtle doves. I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. I'd like to hold it in my arms and keep it company. I'd like to see the world for once all standing hand in hand. And hear them echo through the hills, "Ah, peace throughout the land."

Exclusive To All Papers

HE'S OUR HERO

by Our Football Staff **Gary Spinneker**

NEWSPAPER editors across Britain were clamouring for Tony Blairkham to be knighted after he restored the nation's pride and their circulation with his last-minute strike against Afghanistan.

Blairkham, one half of Britain's number one celebrity couple, after his marriage to Posh Lawyers, stunned his fans with his direct hit on Kabul.

"Despite the second rate nature of our enemy's defences, we couldn't seem to mount one decent attack," said one clearly relieved editor, "and, frankly, we'd all just about given up hope but then, right at the last moment, in extra time added on for diplomacy, he scored the decisive goal and left the way open for our automatic qualification for World War III."

News In Brief

NORMAL SERVICE 'RESUMED SOON'

FOLLOWING the collapse of Railtrack, the Government has assured voters that normal service will be resumed shortly.

"We're of course aware that the accidental renationalisation of a public service means a severe disruption in New Labour's timetable for handing over everything to the private sector," said Steven Byers, "and that these sort of delays are unacceptable to our friends in the City." *(Reuters)*

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

POLLY FILLER

Not in Afghanistan, Tuesday

YVONNE RIDLEY – I hope you are ashamed of yourself! What on earth did you think you were doing, leaving a young child at home while you went off in pursuit of a byline?

Of course women with children should be allowed to do the same jobs as their male colleagues without being criticised as bad mothers by the holier-than-thou brigade. That's taken as read nowadays. No one tells John Simpson to stay at home and look after the kids, do they?

However, and this is an important "however", Yvonne Ridley deliberately put herself at risk knowing that she had a child at home who needed looking after. Not necessarily by her, obviously (we are not in the Middle Ages like the Taliban, thank goodness), and Yvonne was quite within her rights to do her job as competently as her male counterparts. But, and this is a big "but", what about her child?

What I am saying is that some of us manage to do both our job *and* look after our children at the same time – and are *we* plastered all over the front pages and fêted as modern-day heroines? Of course not. We are here on page 27 plugging away on the *real* front line. And we are doing it without needlessly endangering our lives. Some of us have got to be responsible for our toddlers and for our useless partners – and that is real bravery!

SO, when you are reading about how Yvonne Ridley has won Female Journalist of the Year at the Kwik-Fit National Press Awards, spare a thought for the lone figure of a woman sitting at her laptop whilst her toddler safely watches Thunderbirds nextdoor and her hopeless "significant other" is in the Bar Machismo watching live moose wrestling from Winnipeg on the Sky Nasty Channel.

She should be the real winner.

© Polly Filler 2001.

ROY of the LEGOVERS

ALLY Mc COIST IS PLAYING AWAY FROM HOME
LOOK HE'S SCORED AGAIN
NICE DOUBLE CROSS ALLY!
I THINK IT'S ALL OVER
IT IS NOW
THREE GIRLS TO NIL!
J Porter

A Doctor writes

AS A Doctor, I am often asked, "Doctor, will you write us an 800-word piece about Anthrax?"

The simple answer is, "Yes, of course. Is lunchtime okay?"

What happens is that the editor of the Daily Mail is suffering from a severe fever and is in desperate need of an injection of hysteria into his paper.

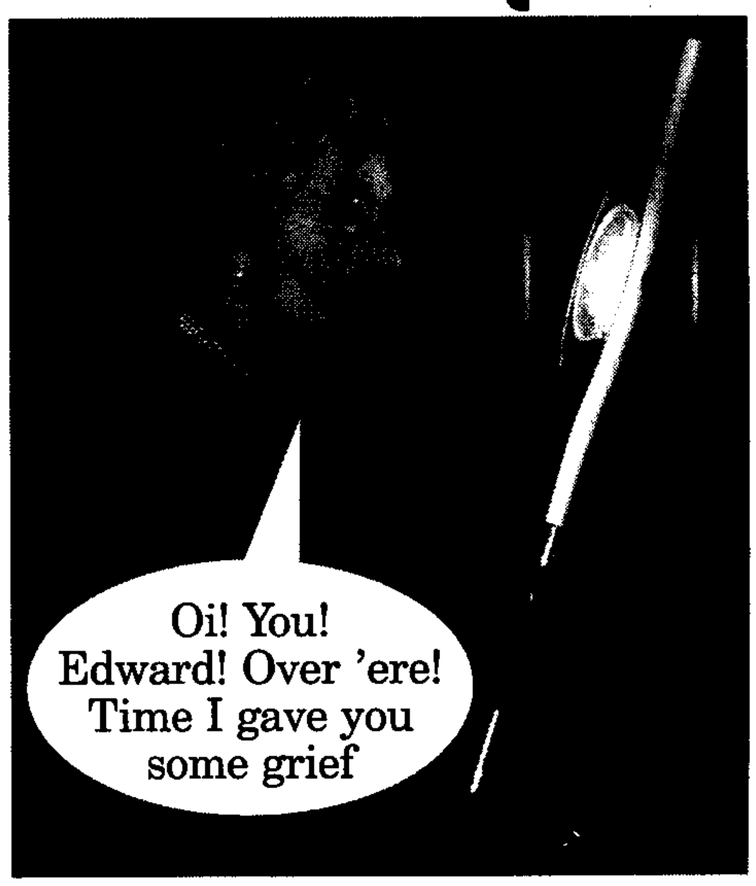
When carried out by a reputable doctor, this simple procedure should immediately increase circulation with only minor side effects for the Mail reader such as panic attacks, depression, anxiety and possibly nausea.

If you are worried about getting an Anthrax article, you should consult me at once, giving precise details of your word rates.

© *A. Doctor.*

You can contact A. Doctor by e-mail on hackdoc@largecheque.con.uk

NEW-LOOK QUEEN



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Lord Hailsham

So. Farewell
Then.
Lord Hailsham.
Formerly Quintin
Hogg.

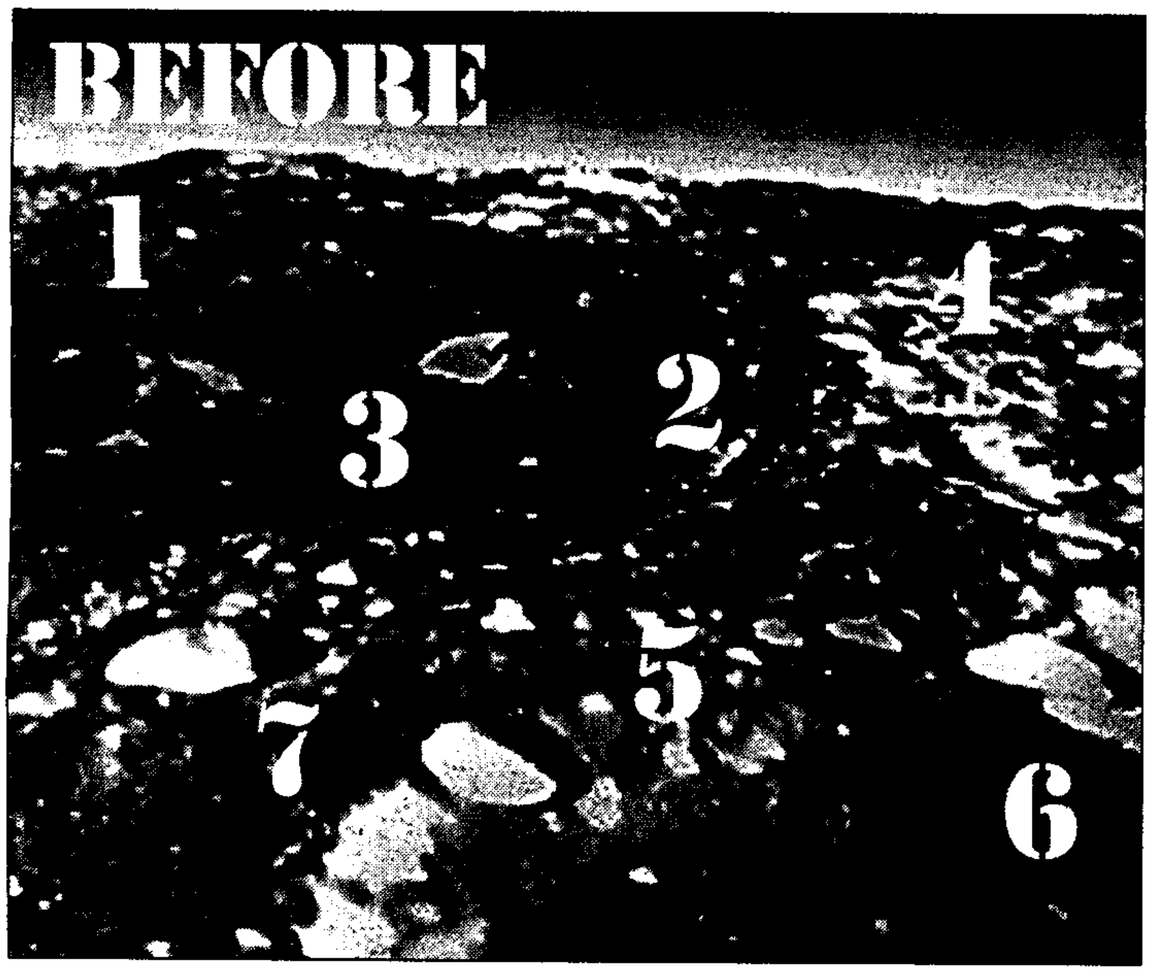
Famous for
Ringing a bell
Once at a Tory
Conference.

Now the Bell
Has tolled
For you.

As we say
In *Private Eye.*
Not Continued
Age 94.

E.J. Thribb

THAT AFGHANISTAN STRIKE



1 Chemical Warfare Centre
2 Nuclear Missile Silo Disguised As Rock
3 Telecommunications Centre Camouflaged As Tree
4 Anthrax Production Facility (Camel Dung)
5 Terrorist Barracks (To Hold Up To 2000 Fully-Trained Mass-Murderers)
6 Barber's Shop (Closed By Order Of Taliban)
7 Prob. Bin Laden In Tent

Nothing

That Air-Dropped Starving Afghan Refugee 'Uncle Sam' Party Bag

Contents In Full

1 Big Mac and French Fries (powdered for astronauts – just add water)
1 Can Coke
1 Deep-Frozen Blueberry Muffin (microwave only)
1 Free Gift Homer Simpson Plastic Model
1 Disney World Balloon

Recipe Of The Week: Bin Lardy Cake

2 tbsp Best Anthrax powder
1pt Botulinus toxin
1 Can Sarin
1lb Lardy
3lb Cake

Serves 3 million people

Next Week: *Clare Shortbread*

News In Brief

US HERALDS 'DUMB BOMBS'

THE US Defence Secretary General Donald Rumsfeld has heralded the performance of the next generation of 'dumb bombs' in the war on terror.

"This next generation of dumb bombs will specifically home in and target schools, hospitals and UN humanitarian aid centres," said Mr Rumsfeld. "These are even stupider than the ones we deployed to devastating effect during the Gulf War and in Yugoslavia, and we already see a far greater scope for their stupidity here."

What You Didn't Miss

Phil Airtime *(in studio)*: ...and as air strikes continue over Afghanistan, we go live to our reporter Philippa Screen, who is with the Northern Alliance forces only 30 kilometres from Kabul.

(Cut to black screen with occasional yellow flash in background)

Philippa Screen *(dressed in anorak and headscarf)*: Yes, hullo Phil. I'm with the Northern Alliance, only 30 kilometres from Kabul, where the coalition bombardment is now in its 94th day. The night sky is lit up with yellow flashes, which I am told are definitely some sort of bombs or shells, probably dropped by US, or possibly British, planes, flying in the very sky you can see above me here.

Airtime: These planes, Philippa – you say that they were possible American or British. Could you elaborate on that?

Screen: Well, yes Phil. The general view here on the ground, as we watch the night sky lit up with yellow flashes, is that these are definitely likely to be American aircraft, although we are not yet in a position from where we are to give a definitive answer to that question.

Phil: And where exactly are you, Philippa?

Philippa: Well, Phil, I'm approximately 30 kilometres from the Afghan capital of Kabul, where as you can see from the flashes on the...

Phil: Thank you, Philippa. We'll come back to you in a couple of minutes for an update on that fast-changing situation. But now, we have in the studio John Nerdibloke, the editor of Jane's Fighting Bombs, who is a defence expert.

(Shot of man in beard and glasses looking very excited)

Nerdibloke *(for it is he)*: It's pretty clear from watching your pictures there that what we are seeing is a high-level attack on Kabul probably by a combination of B2 stealth strike aircraft with some of the latest laser-guided Tomacruise missiles.

Phil: Thanks, John, but I'm afraid we'll have to leave it there, because we're now going over live to Washington where Secretary of State Donald Rumpole is holding a live press conference in the Pentagon.

(Cut to earnest American in glasses in front of huge stars and stripes flag)

Rumcove *(for it is he)*: I'm glad to be able to report that following tonight's attack on Kabul, all our cruise missiles returned home safely.

American Journalist: Mr Secretary, are you in a position to give us any detail on the identity of the targets in tonight's mission, and what was the percentage success rate?

Rumpsteak: Well, I have to tell you, Jack, that that information is classified. Indeed, it is so secret that we could not even tell the pilots what they were aiming at. But I can tell you that there was no collateral damage whatever, except a bit.

Phil: That was Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld live from Washington. And now we've just managed to get through on the videophone to Paddy Tout, who's in Dopeja, the capital of Kanhabistan, which borders Afghanistan on the north west. Paddy, what is the mood where you are tonight?

Paddy Tout *(speaking over crackly videophone)*: Well, Phil, it's not entirely easy to gauge the situation here in Kanhabistan. I've been trying to find a television set, to find out what's going on, but they don't seem to have any tellies in this country.

Phil: Thank you, Paddy. And now for an update on that bombardment of Kabul we showed you earlier. We're going back to our reporter Philippa Screen in Northern Afghanistan, who is in the front line only 30 kilometres from Kabul.

(Cut to Philippa lying asleep on rock, exhausted by strain of having to provide updates every 10 minutes. Distant flashes in sky continue for 94 hours...)

BIRT FUNERAL NOT TO BE COVERED

by **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother**

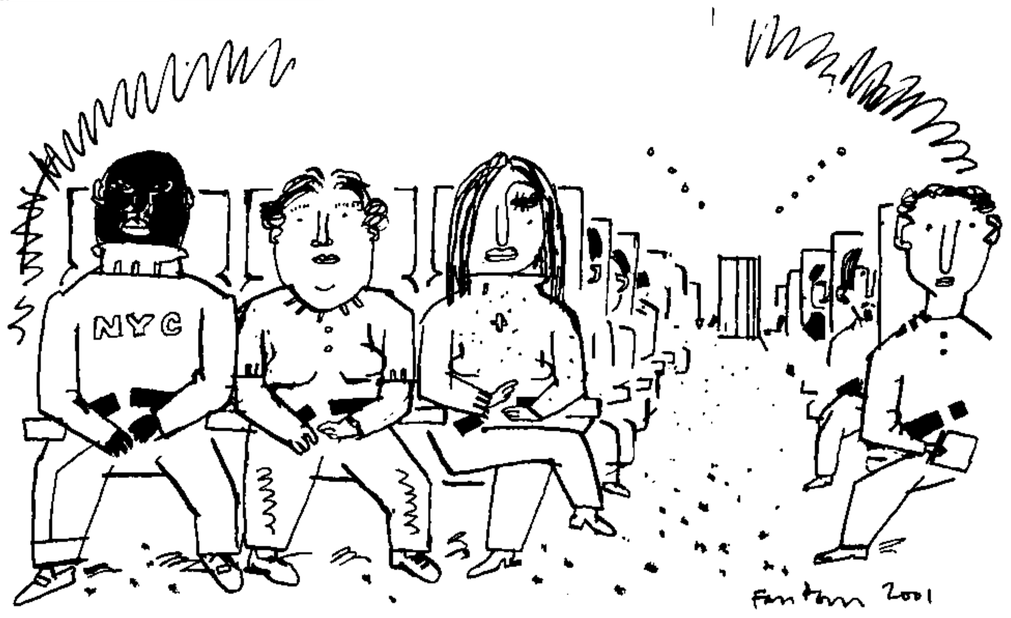
IN A radical shake-up of the BBC-planned week-long coverage of the funeral of former director-general Lord Birt, BBC chiefs have now decided "in the 21st century" it would no longer be appropriate to mark the passing of Lord Birt at all.

"The days are gone," said BBC1 controller Lorraine Chase, "when solemn music would be played and all programmes taken off, just because some old fogey had turned up his toes."

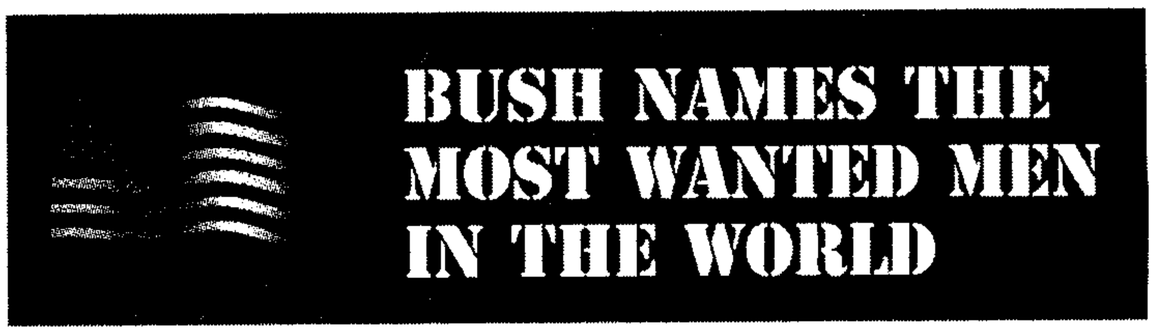
LAYING A REITH

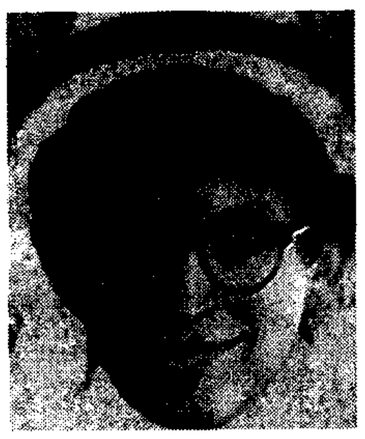
"I do not wish to be disrespectful to his Lordship, who was a much hated figure in his time. But today's audience wants to see programmes like Eastenders and Eastenders – not some old has-been getting buried."

Lord Birt is 101.

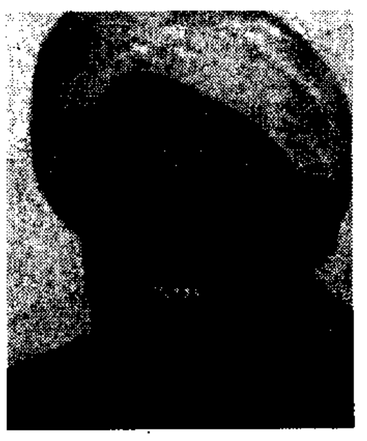


"Your chief steward is David, assisted today by Michelle and Kevin. Father Michael is our in-flight priest and he will be hearing confessions as soon as the seat belt sign has been turned off"

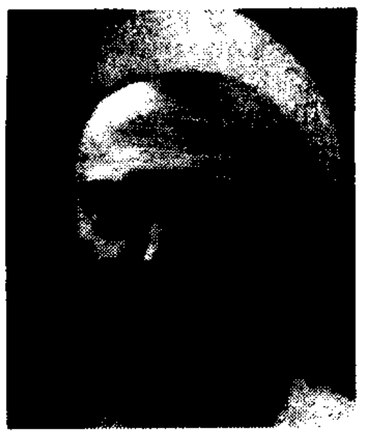




Al An Rubbisha
Fanatical
anti-American
editor

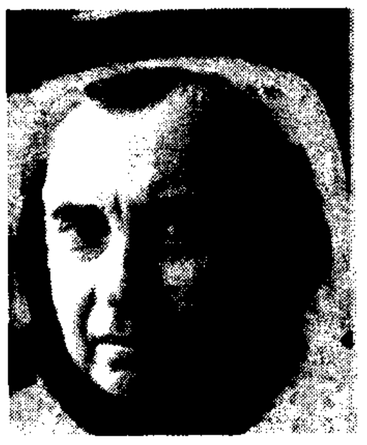


Jon Pil-Ja
Fanatical
anti-American
broadcaster



Har Al Pinta
Fanatical
anti-American
playwright

Shelkh Mas Milne
Fanatical
anti-American
columnist



Gor Vid-Al
Fanatical
anti-American
American

Tony Benn Laden
Fanatical
anti-American pipe-smoker *(shome mishtake, shurely)*

TORY LEADER ASKED TO 'STAY AWAY FROM BLACKPOOL'

by Our Political Staff **Matthew D'Arshola**

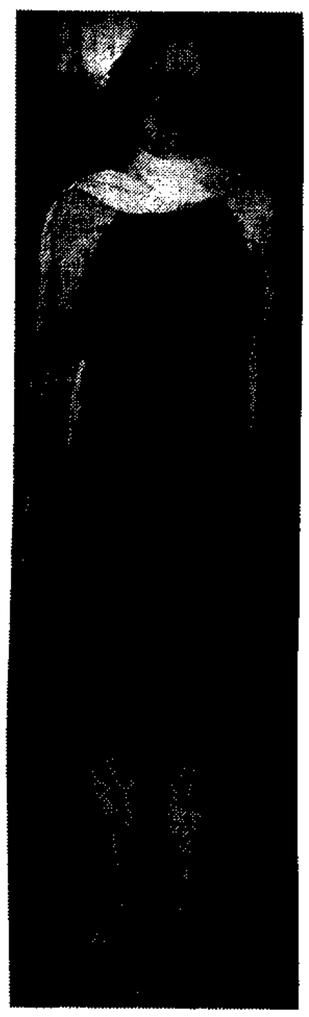
THE Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith was asked not to attend this year's Tory Party Conference, I can reveal, on the grounds that his appearance on the platform would be "embarrassing".

A senior Party source told me, "It was felt that for Mr Duncan Smith to be seen at the podium would send the wrong message to the electorate, ie that he was incredibly boring."

CONRAD BLACKPOOL

But a defiant Mr Duncan Smith insisted on ignoring the advice of senior Party figures and making a long speech praising Mr Blair for the firm leadership he was giving the country in all respects.

He was given a sleeping ovation lasting well over three hours.



IN

TELEGRAPH FASHION

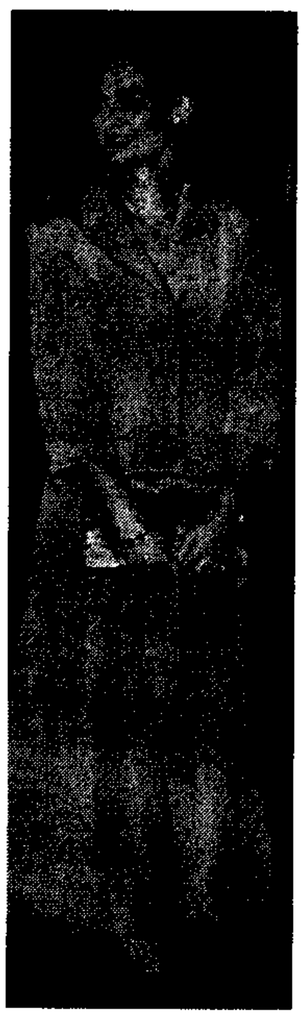
'Blue Is The New Red'

by Top Fashion Expert
Charlotta Moore

YES! There's only one thing that people were talking about last night and that was the incredible "new look" unveiled yesterday on the Blackpool catwalk. For sheer style, this is unbeatable and in my opinion will be incredibly popular with the whole country overnight. Just take a look!

IN comes the elegant, beautiful, sexy, modern, inclusive, tough-but-caring "Betsy" range and OUT goes the old-fashioned, dated, unworkable, frumpy, boring, ghastly, "Cherie" collection.

© *The Daily Betsygraph.*



OUT

HITLER WAS 'A NAZI'

Shock New Claim

by Our History Staff **Gay Search**

A NEW book about the life of Adolf Hitler has produced compelling new evidence that the former Führer was in fact a Nazi.

Historians have always believed that Hitler was just an ordinary homosexual who liked painting and dressing up in uniforms.

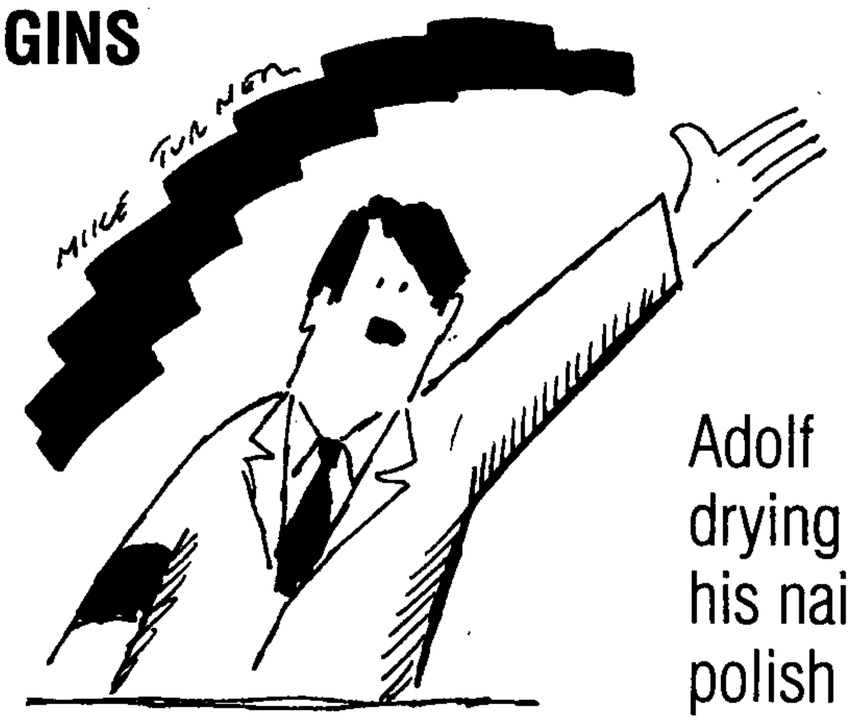
Now in his shocking new biography of the German leader, author Dr Münnigrübber reveals that Hitler was in fact a member of a far-right organisation bent on world domination.

Nowt So Queer As Volk

"He liked hanging around with other fascists wearing jackboots and invading Poland," says the controversial historian. "What more proof do you need? My book offers definite proof that any old rubbish about Hitler gets lots of publicity and huge pieces in the Telegraph."

Starting tomorrow: 'Did Hitler Have A Secret Moustache?'

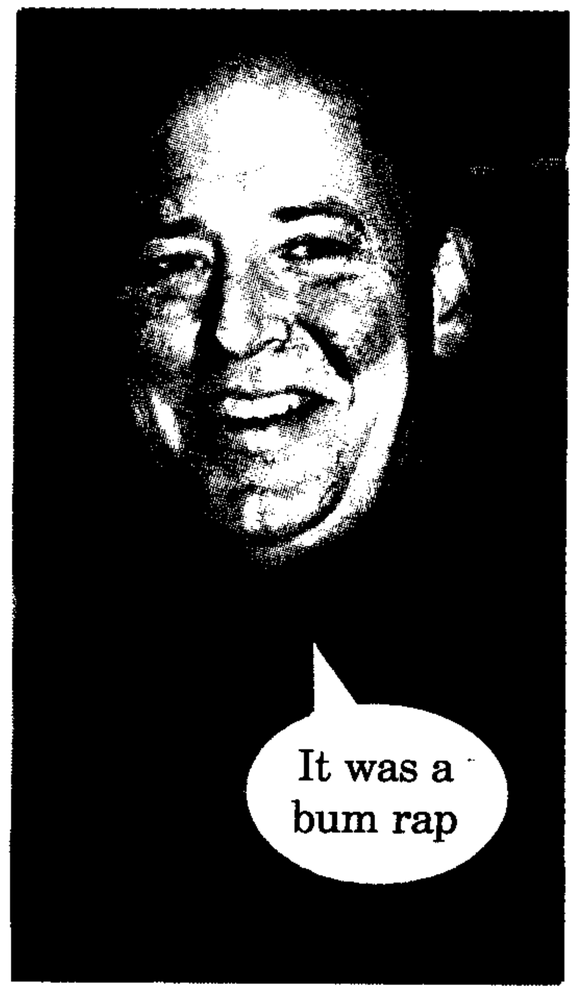
THE ORIGINS OF THE NAZI SALUTE



Adolf drying his nail polish

EATING AT.....
THE IVY
COME ON, I'LL GET US IN, NO PROBLEM....
...COULD WE HAVE A TABLE FOR TWO?
YOU'D BETTER TAKE YOUR GLASSES OFF! PEOPLE ARE RECOGNISING YOU!
YOU USED TO PHOTOGRAPH ME WHEN I WAS IN 'EAST-ENDERS'!
CERTAINLY SIR, HOW ABOUT 6pm THURSDAY 22ND JAN 2002?
LADEN BIN IN?
THANKS FOR ASKING ME HERE, WHAT IS IT YOU WANTE TO TELL ME?
YOU'RE FIRED!
ISN'T THAT THE CHAP, WHAT'S HIS NAME? HE USED TO BE IN 'LOVE-JOY'?
I ONCE PLAYED YORICK IN JOHNNY G's, 'HAMLET'
REALLY, SIR!
TELL ME ALL ABOUT THE OLD DAYS IN HOLLYWOOD?

BARRYMORE CLEARED



It was a bum rap

DIARY

ANDREW MOTION
The Meaning Of It All

1

Bright spring grass
Shoots useless under the eye of heaven.
Yes, I will always remember that day
long after I have almost forgotten it
that terrible, terrible, terrible day
that truly terrible, really perfectly awful
day, certainly not a day I'd care
to live through again, when
the centre for world trade or,
to put it another way,
the world trade centre, also known
as the twin towers because
there were two-of-them,
side-by-side
suddenly-suddenly
burst-burst into
flames-flames
with a great whoosh
like a candle lit by a match
but really far worse because
you don't light a candle with an aeroplane
and also when you light a candle
it lets out a gentle glow to read
lovely words by
but no-one even attempted to read by
the flash-burning-light of the twin towers
as they tried to run, run, run, run, run
away from the great flapping-salmon
of destiny.

2

People
fall
ing
from
a
great
height.
When the caster-of-news,
or newscaster,
told us of the twin towers
news-news
I sighted a tear
drip-dripping down his cheek. But no:
I didn't really. Though I would have done
if he had been crying which
on reflection I don't
think he was.

3

I too have ridden in planes,
I too have travelled by air.
I am a club-class man myself.
Twice the comfort for substantially
less than twice the expense.
High high in the sky the steel-bird
swoops and flutters, the pilot
where the bird-head would be
tweeting merrily to ground-control.
And then – what?
To be honest, nothing like that has
ever happened to me up up up in the air
though I once experienced an uncomfortable
bit of turbulence halfway
between Stansted and Sicily and
obeying the pilot's instructions
refastened my seat-belt.

4

One thing is for sure:
nothing will
ever
be the same again.

5

Imagine Osama bin Laden,
bearded, in his low-on-facilities cave
somewhere deep-deep in the very-very
hilly mountains of Afghanistan.
What is he thinking as he strokes
that beard, that very beardy
beard? Is he perchance
experiencing doubts? "Now I've
really gone and done it," he curses
as the bombs drop all around,
boom-bang-a-
bang,
boom-bang-a-
bang,
shaking the pictures
hang
-ing on the walls of his cave or that would
hang
there if only he'd got round
to putting them up.

6

The question is
what is the correct response
to this most horrid and frankly
uncalled-for
act of aggression? As the bomb-torrent
falls like bits and pieces of clutter – a bottle-top,
a free gift from a cornflakes packet, a boiled-sweet –
off a kitchen table onto the floor,
only much, much harder,
on the once-proud people of Afghanistan
we sit at home immobile
stationary and unmoving
wondering why. What oh what
can the poet do? Reaching out to the world,
how can he (or of course she because there
are some extremely challenging
and inspiring female
voices around) meet the demand of
distilling words of universal relevance,
offering exciting new perspectives
on a tremendous diversity of themes?

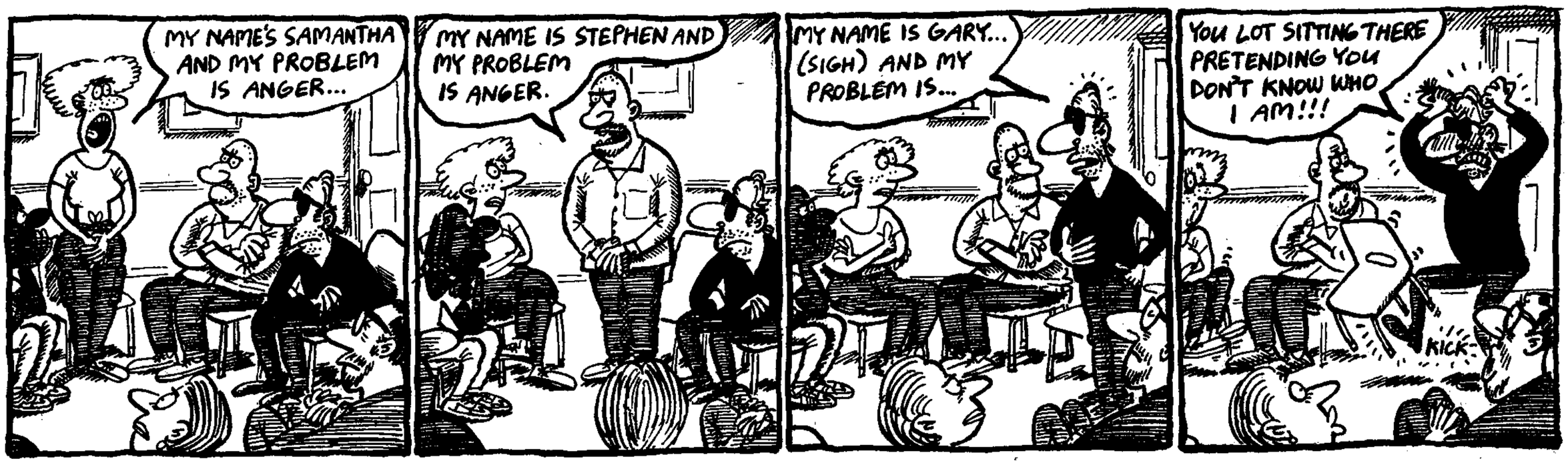
7

Autumn leaves drop droppingly on the roof
of bin Laden's cave. Inside, all is soft
and mellow. Suddenly – a knock-knock-knock
on the cave-door. Osama calls "Come in!"
Why, it is the Poet Laureate, armed with
a challenging new take on world
events. Osama strokes his beard, his
big-bushy-beard and bids the Poet
commence his reading. By the time it is
over, Osama realises that this is the highlight
of his cultural year. Digging deep within his
heart, Osama finds the poet inside. Why wage
war against the Infidel, he thinks, when
there is so much more to be gain-gained
from bringing poetry to a wider public?
And after autumn comes winter
and after winter comes spring.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

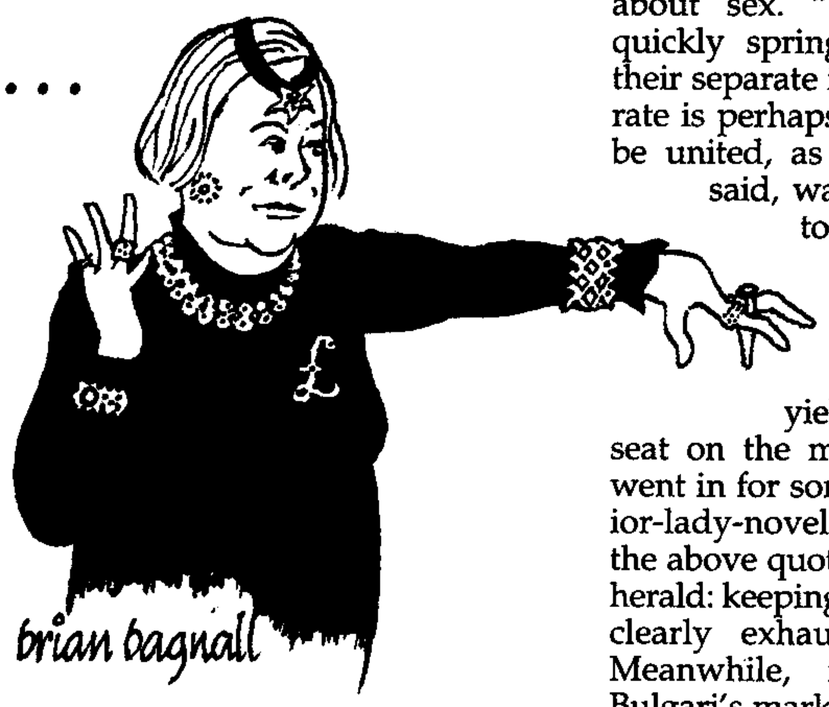
Celeb

LIGGER


MY NAME'S SAMANTHA AND MY PROBLEM IS ANGER...
MY NAME IS STEPHEN AND MY PROBLEM IS ANGER.
MY NAME IS GARY... (SIGH) AND MY PROBLEM IS...
YOU LOT SITTING THERE PRETENDING YOU DON'T KNOW WHO I AM!!!
KICK-

Literary Review

Au fait, oh Fay...



The Bulgari Connection
Fay Weldon
(Flamingo, £16.99)

IT TAKES only a glance at the thronged preliminary "Also by Fay Weldon" page to establish that all this — the books, the interventions in so many areas of our national life — has been going on for a very long time. Two dozen novels. Five short-story collections. Assorted works of non-fiction and child-fare. In a prolific and lime-lit career, the single most reliable thing about Fay Weldon has been her unreliability. Good novel one year, stinker the next. The current one, a brisk little tale of contending glitterati, TV, money and art, is one of the worst.

Part of it, inevitably, has to do with the publicity angle. Fay always has a publicity angle. She's a brand, you see, and being the literary equivalent of Domestos imposes certain responsibilities. This year's offering hangs on the fact — brazenly acknowledged before publication — that she received an unspecified sum from the upmarket jewellery house of Bulgari.

And when it comes to thanking the people who paid the bill, however, Fay is in a class, or rather an exhibition showroom, of her own. *The Bulgari Connection*'s plot takes in a besotted financier named Barley Salt (Weldon's people always have funny names, but more about this in a moment) who has dumped his long-term wife Gracie for a bit of thirtysomething TV posh called Doris Dubois. As well as ordering up the complete refurbishment of the Salt pile in the country and a suite at Claridges, Doris covets a piece of high-grade neckware sported by a society babe named Lady Juliet Ransom.

According to the PR brochure which Ms W appears to have copied out word for word, this is of "steel and gold set with cabochon emeralds, rubies, sapphires and brilliant cut diamonds, made in the sixties, and insured for £275,000..." Not content with puffing the product, Fay would also seem to have a clause in her contract obliging her to puff the emporium as well. This can only explain the references to its "soft carpeted opulence... and the attentive staff, and the hushed reverence with which they attended to the whims of their customers, with the timeless and exquisite courtesy which has been offered since rich society began."

Timeless and exquisite what? And to think that for all these years we've been including Ms Weldon's oeuvre in surveys of contemporary women's fiction and inviting her on to the radio. What really sinks the ship, though, is not so much the thought of Bulgari's pay check hanging in the ether above the page, as Fay's characteristic procedural tic — her inability to stop over-schematising things.

It is a fact that no one ever takes a breath in her books that isn't figurative (this one, just to ram the point home, harbours a shrink named, er, Jason Doom). Naturally, as soon as Barley throws over the plump companion of his youth, he and his inamorata find their careers in steep decline. Gracie, meanwhile, hooks up with a portrait painter named Walter, has a raving affair and starts looking younger by the minute. You get the picture? (The Dorian Gray theme is further rubbed in by Walter's commission to superimpose Doris's face on a portrait of Lady Juliet). Simultaneously, Fay's other procedural tic — the need to be au fait — is twitching away in the background, with lots of jolly jokes about new Labour, medialand, art galleries and so on.

Oh, and there are lots of epigrams, lots of very serious thoughts about life. On page 117 for instance Fay decides that "In youth the convulsions of fate, fortune and love come at short intervals: as one grows older the stretches of non-event are longer, but the convulsions are more extreme, and come as tidal waves in a calm sea, rather than as little peaks of fluff and foam in choppy water." On page 150, we find her ruminating about sex. "Without it, couples quickly spring apart and resume their separate identities. To be separate is perhaps a nobler aim, but to be united, as St Paul might have said, was at least better than to burn."

Well, yes indeedy. Between you and me I think it's time that Fay yielded up her window-seat on the modern charivari and went in for some of the wistful senior-lady-novelist meditations that the above quotations might seem to herald: keeping up with the trends is clearly exhausting her energies. Meanwhile, if I were Messrs Bulgari's marketing director, I think I'd be scanning the "situations ÿvacant" column in *Jewels and Jewelling* with more than usual interest.

War and piecemeal

Atonement
Ian McEwan
(Cape, £16.99)

ALL male writers of a certain age now feel they must tackle the big one. War. It beckons to them softly at first, a literary Lorelei, then more insistently, the siren song becoming an air raid wail. Ah the smell of cordite at the keyboard! No matter how many delicious descriptions of severed limbs, gaping wounds, groaning wounded and grinning corpses already clog the supermarket stands of Waterstone's or Books etc, there must be room for one more.

With *Birdsong*, *Corelli* et al selling like hot shellcases, it certainly makes economic sense. And now Ian McEwan, no stranger to the gruesome parade of human cruelty, has pitched in with his pennyworth.

Except his has all been recreated by a writer who's researched it in chilling, redundant detail at the Imperial War Museum. Not McEwan but his heroine, Briony Tallis. The novel turns out to be her work, set down in the atonement of the title for something she did as a child.

She told a lie and it ruined a life. Two lives in fact. At the age of 13, on a hot summer's night in 1935, she wrongly accused a young man called Robbie Turner, who was in love with her elder sister, Cecilia, of having sexually assaulted her 15-year-old cousin Lola Quincey. It happened in the garden in the dark and Lola either didn't see or wouldn't say who the shadowy figure was that ran away upon Briony's approach. Briony didn't see either, but she thinks it must have been Turner because, earlier that day, she opened and read a love letter from him to her sister and it contained a rude word (4 letters, begins with C), and she subsequently disturbed the two of them bonking furiously in the library. From this she concludes that Turner, who is not from the same class (he's the charlady's son who got a scholarship to grammar school) is a sex maniac.

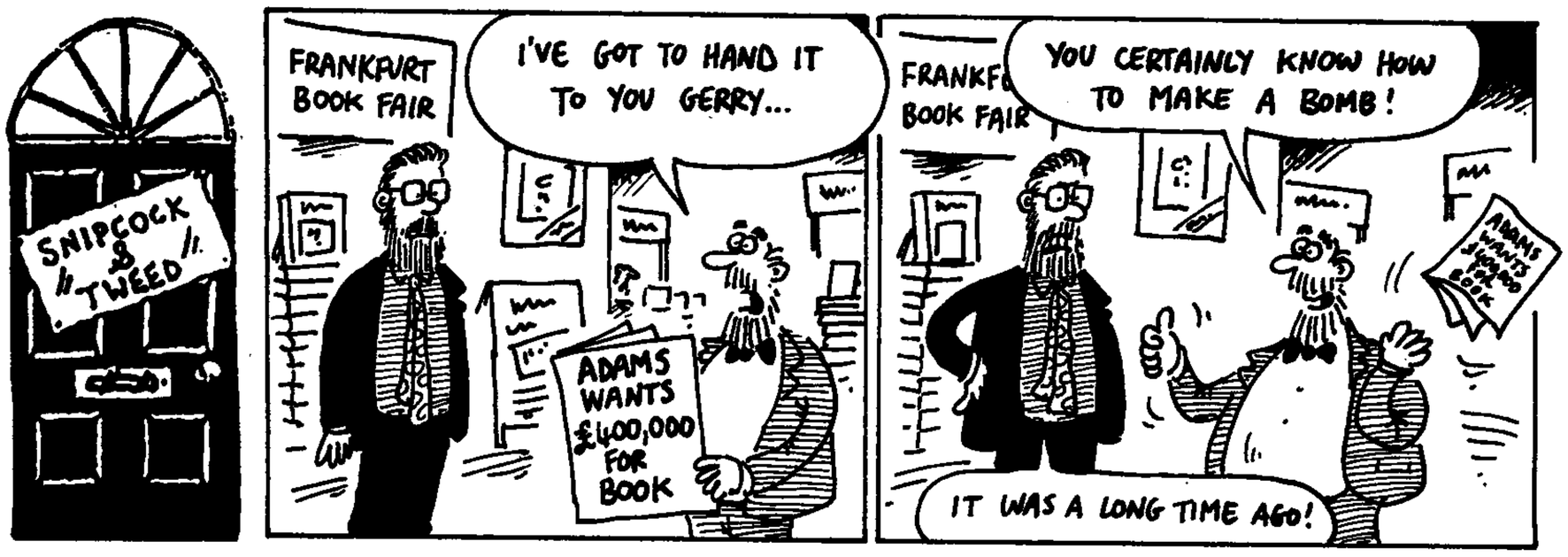
All this takes place in an old-fashioned country house and its landscaped gardens, among a crowd of people who seem to have wandered out of a middle-period Iris Murdoch novel. This part of the story — the arrival of the Quincey cousins, Lola and her twin brothers, the little play that Briony makes them all take part in, a symbolic scene involving Cecilia and Turner wrestling with a priceless antique vase by the fountain, cocktails by the swimming pool, an agonising dinner party during which the twins run away and everyone goes out into the dark to look for them — is minutely described at inordinate, slow-motion length and beady-eyed psychological depth.

The sultry atmosphere and the sexual tension and confusion are as intense as the migraine headache which keeps the Tallis girls' mother in bed all afternoon (described with a typically McEwanesque touch as feeling like twin kitchen knives against her optic nerves). Though long and lingering, it's an impressive start. The real problem is with what follows.

At the ensuing trial, which is not reported, the identification evidence of Briony (a precocious child who makes up stories), corroborated only by that rude love letter is, rather implausibly, enough to secure a conviction and imprison Turner for the next three and a half years. We next see him in France, four years later, a private in the British Expeditionary Force in the throes of its hasty and disorganised retreat to Dunkirk. Cue the severed limbs and grinning corpses.

Now McEwan is really in his element. There's some lovely Messerschmitt strafing and Stuka dive bombing and plenty of evidence of the awfulness and occasional heroism of humanity. But Turner has been wounded by shrapnel and is plainly not going to make it home. Meanwhile both Cecilia (who alone has believed in Turner's innocence) and Briony have become nurses, and the next section of the book lingers over yet more descriptions of dead and dying soldiers and their horrific wounds.

No account is given of Briony's intellectual or psychological development after her act of perjury, but now she decides it's time to wipe the slate clean and offers to recant her evidence. It is of course too late, so the only way she can purge her


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR
I'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO YOU GERRY...
ADAMS WANTS £400,000 FOR BOOK
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR
YOU CERTAINLY KNOW HOW TO MAKE A BOMB!
ADAMS WANTS £400,000 FOR BOOK
IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO!

perjury is to rewrite the story with a happy ending. (She is a writer, you see: that little play was just the start.) And so Turner comes home safe and is reunited with Cecilia and they live, presumably, happy ever after. Except that all this is just more of Briony's lies. The real story is obviously not the one you've read. Clever, eh? So what really happened?

Perhaps what happened is that McEwan had a good idea for a psychological country house whodunnit of novella length, and a lot of excellent gory copy for a war novel but no story to attach it to. So he linked the two with that evergreen, self-justifying standby: the writer writing about writing. "The problem," says Briony/McEwan is "how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God?"

All of us wish we could rewrite our pasts: Briony has done just that; but the exercise is futile since none of it is true. The answer to the riddle is simple enough: not by writing novels, and certainly not by delving into the archives of the Imperial War Museum and disgorging a lot of second-hand shock-horror.

That *Atonement* should be on the Booker shortlist is unsurprising: sex and war are perennial favourites and perjury is this year's crime.

Books & Bookmen

■ ALTHOUGH fears of terrorist action kept attendances down at the Frankfurt book fair, New Era, the publishing arm of the "Church" of Scientology, attended in force. Not content with bringing yet more books from the world's most prolific corpse, L Ron Hubbard, the company also offered a cynical and sinister service to those distressed fairgoers who made the trip.

On the Wednesday morning of the fair Sharyn Runyon, billed as the "leader of the volunteer disaster relief team at [the] World Trade Center", was on the New Era stand to discuss "details of the disaster relief activities, centering on the mental/spiritual causes and effects of the tragedy". Unfortunately, the press release chose not to spell out that, in addition to her selfless volunteer work, Runyon is the director of the Friends of L Ron Hubbard Foundation.

No surprise, then, that her rescue work was conducted "using techniques based on" Hubbard's book Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health, these techniques being "increasingly recognised by disaster relief services not only in New York but worldwide as uniquely effective".

Er, up to a point. Most sensible rescue workers regard the Hubbardian therapy as nothing but cynical ambulance chasing. The main form of relief in which Hubbard's outpourings are "uniquely effective" is in relieving the emotionally weak and vulnerable of large sums of money. The experiences of the World Trade Center, the press release said, "give us a new understanding, and there are solutions". Could these solutions have involved joining the "Church" and forking over vast piles of cash? Surely not.

■ COMEDIAN Frank Skinner, whose autobiography has just been published by Century, has been thinking deeply about the whole process. "Writing [an autobiography] is a fairly mercenary thing to do. So I might regret it in the end," he told Rebecca Tyrrel in the *Sunday Torygraph* magazine. Er, is holding out for a £750,000 advance, such as Skinner received, merely "fairly mercenary"? One shudders to think what Century would have had to pay had Skinner and his agents Avalon really got stuck in.

■ SIMILARLY fond of a pound note is Louise Bagshawe, the "shag and shop" novelist who has decided to drop the non-retail aspect from her books on account of her strong Catholicism (see last *Eye*).

Now, in an interview with the *Observer*'s cash supplement in which she declared herself "a firm believer in capitalism and Thatcherism", dismissed her own books as "trashy" and paid tribute to Lord Archole as a major literary influence, la Bagshawe has announced that she will be retiring to Italy in 10 years when she is 40.

She says she and her real estate agent husband have been "building up a portfolio of investments we can live off". The no-sex revelation was enough of a blow to her publisher Anthony "Fatty" Cheetham, but having been living richly off Bagshawe and her ilk, the premature loss of such an important part of his own portfolio of investments is sure to cause him greater pain.

■ WITH Penguin having taken over the increasingly aged-looking James Bond backlist from Hodder for a massive rejacketing and reprint programme next year, it is perhaps easy to forget that Hodder still churns out new Bond novels, approved by Glidrose — the company that runs the Ian Fleming estate.

After Fleming's death the job was taken over by a host of writers, including Kingsley Amis, working under the nom de plume of Robert Markham, and John Gardner. The current ghost is an American called Raymond Benson, who wrote *The James Bond Bedside Companion*, for years regarded as the definitive reference work on 007. He has, however, been upsetting fans with his none-too-subtle descriptions of Bond's encounters with his own bedside companions.

In the last Bond novel, *Never Dream of Dying* (known in fan circles as *Never Dream of Buying*), Benson used hitherto-unheard-of words like "clitoris" and "vulva". Maybe such crudity is needed to keep the modern Bond saleable, but it is alarmingly rich coming from a man who snobbishly declared in the *Bedside Companion* that "where Fleming is to be savoured at Sardi's, Gardner is to be munched at McDonald's".

'Bookworm'

Pseuds Corner

Some people will choose the new Peugeot 307 HDi 110 because we've made the cleanest diesel engine in the world. Some because it's quieter and more refined. Some because of its quite exceptional performance. Some because of the Particulate Filter, ultra low CO2 emissions and Level 1 Benefit in Kind tax advantages. And some because future generations will thank them.

Advertisement

Beauty is the compass that prevents us from losing ourselves in the desolate white noise that is the prison of reality.

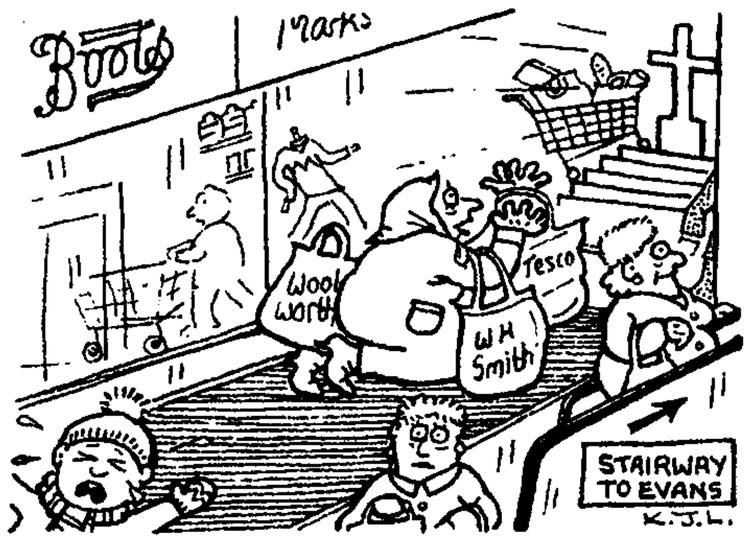
JEAN GIRAUD
Air France in-flight magazine

Yes... he's almost winsomely naïve in his eclecticism.

MICHAEL BERKELEY (on Alfred Schnittke) 'Private Passions', Radio 3

Deconstruction is perhaps always, ultimately, through the deconstruction of carno-phallogocentrism, the deconstruction of this historical scaffolding of capital punishment, of the history of this scaffold or as history as scaffolding of this scaffold. Deconstruction, what we call by this name, is perhaps, *perhaps*, perhaps the deconstruction of capital punishment, of logocentric, logo-nomocentric scaffolding in which capital punishment is inscribed or prescribed.

Abstract of lecture by JACQUES DERRIDA on 'Globalization and Capital Punishment', Chinese University of Hong Kong



Worship for us is not necessarily going to church. Touchwood and Bluewater are celebrations of the purity of one's life, celebrations of the heritage of community. A piece of clothing that pleases a child can bring as much of a tear to the eye as a good hymn.

ERIC KUHNE (shopping mall designer)
The Times

In the fourth century B.C., Aristotle and his students focused on ethics and justice. They identified two types of justice: (a) corrective justice such as is the proper punishment for criminals and (b) distributive justice or the equal sharing of inputs and values or rewards among individuals or groups of people. Aristotle was describing the basic elements of what we might call buyer-seller relationships.

DON SCHULZ and SCOTT BAILEY
Journal for Advertising Research

Pseuds Corporate

To be a premium, focused niche pub retailer. Defined by sustained value creation. Realised by organisational effectiveness and enhanced product offering.

Acknowledged by customers "my pub is a great pub".

The Toad brand prides itself on evolution and is ever responsive to customer needs, it trades as a true chameleon bar operation, with three very distinct 'moods' and offerings...

The main proposition from 11am – 3pm is a competitive priced food offering, from 3pm – 7pm the offering has a more continental slant with added value food offers and a range of coffees/hot beverages, being the focus. The engine room of the business is from 7pm till close, where the emphasis is a highly fashionable liquor offering, complemented by a leading edge entertainment programme.

From the Eldridge Pope website

CONTRIBUTORS: P.T. Hill, Anthony Shelton, William McHugh, Laurence Goldstein, John Caffyn, Birgitte Bratcher, Technical Section, West Sussex County Council.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

SPLENDOUR OF THE GRASS

PERHAPS the most curious piece of information about the heroin addict Michael Stone who has been convicted for the second time of the gruesome murder of Mrs Lynn Russell and her young daughter is that he was a paid police informant.

Kent police will not confirm that he was registered as an informer, but a spokeswoman conceded that that is the only interpretation on the facts that emerged at both his trials.

At the first trial, detective sergeant Norman Larmore of Kent police told the court that he had met Stone on 5 July 1996, four days before the murder. Mr Larmore didn't give evidence at Stone's recent re-trial at Nottingham crown court, but it was agreed that Stone had seen a policeman in a pub on 10 July, the day after the murder.

Damien Daley: The only grass left

Quite why such a desperate, down-and-out heroin addict should be seeing these police officers in such cosy surroundings was never made clear. The reason, however, was that Stone was telling the coppers about people who, he thought, might be taking part in a Gay Pride march in London in July, the month of the Russell murders.

For some reason the police thought this march was important enough to seek information about it from a man they knew to be a convict and an addict, and to pay him for his help. From the moment he was first arrested (a year after the murders), Stone told his family that he could be more certain where he was on the afternoon of the murders if he could remember the date of the gay pride march. The police told him and his family, that the march was on the weekend of 12 July, whereas in fact it was a week earlier.

There may have been other meetings Stone had with the police around the time of the murder. Two years ago he told Jo-Anne Goodwin of the *Daily Mail* that he recalled a meeting in Rochester police station at 6pm on 9 July. This was rather important information since 9 July was the day of the murders and Stone would have found it hard to get to the police station all spruced up at six after committing such terrible and bloody murders at around 4.45pm.

Jo-Anne Goodwin mentioned this conversation in the *Daily Mail* in one of her many articles about the case — on 8 June 1999. Kent police insist they have no record of any such meeting and deny that it took place.

THE STORY OF TEX RITTER

AT STONE's first trial three witnesses gave evidence that he had confessed to the murders while in prison. Their names were Thompson, Jennings and Daley.

Immediately after the trial Thompson admitted he'd told "a pack of lies" and that Stone had not confessed at all. Jennings admitted he'd been offered thousands of pounds by the *Sun*. Both witnesses were obviously tarnished and were dispensed with.

The court of appeal ordered a retrial, which has just finished. Of the three grasses, only one — Damien Daley — was left. He said Stone had confessed to him in lurid terms by shouting down a pipe between two cells. When it was put to Daley that he was a violent crook of stupendous proportions, Daley agreed at once. He said, yes, he was a crook and a liar (indeed he had lied under oath at the original trial); but he swore he would never tell a lie in a case involving the murder of a child.

At the time of the alleged confession Daley was on remand for arson, affray and assault. All the charges were later dropped. So were other charges of robbery and grievous bodily harm, and in September last year Daley was acquitted on other charges of actual bodily harm and affray. The closest parallel to Daley's story is the intriguing precedent of a con-man called "Tex" Ritter, who gave evidence of a prison confession by James Robinson, who had been charged with the 1978 murder of schoolboy Carl Bridgewater.

Ritter greatly impressed the judge at the 1979 trial. Mr Justice Drake reminded the jury that Ritter had insisted on giving evidence on the Old Testament. "Perhaps you found his evidence unusually convincing for a man of his background," said the judge. As a result of this crucial evidence, Robinson was convicted and Ritter received a royal pardon letting him off 44 days of his sentence.

When the case was referred to the court of appeal in 1987-88, volumes of evidence were produced to show that Ritter had all his life been a congenital and pathological liar. On one occasion he had conned money by pretending that he was opening a school for the blind in China. When asked by a policeman why he told such dreadful lies, Ritter replied: "There's one born every minute. It's a challenge every time."

Among those who had been born every minute were the three judges at the court of appeal, Russell, Leonard and Potts. After hearing all this evidence, the judges preferred Ritter's own evidence that although he was occasionally a bit of a deceiver, he would never ever lie in a case involving the death of child. They pronounced Ritter a "witness of truth". It took another nine years, and another appeal in 1997, before the judges finally accepted that Ritter had taken the whole criminal justice system for a ride — in exchange for uncharacteristic mercy from the authorities.

● MEANWHILE Kent police themselves have been having other difficulties with domestic violence. Not long ago, Karl Bluestone killed his wife and two children with a claw hammer before hanging himself, and a recent issue of the *Gravesend Messenger* (27 September) reported the case of Stephen Tagg, whom it described as "a collector of military memorabilia".

Last summer Tagg split from his girlfriend Dolores Reid. In a series of phone calls, he threatened to kill her. She told Kent police. When two officers arrived at his house, Mr Tagg vanished into another room and emerged flourishing a two-foot wooden pole with a bayonet attached to it.

The officers feared for their safety, though after a scuffle the bayonet ended up on the floor. Mr Tagg was arrested and taken into custody. In court later, he admitted threatening the officers and is in custody awaiting sentence. Like Karl Bluestone, at the time of his offence Mr Tagg was a constable in Kent constabulary.

Wind farms

A CRUEL BLOW

TOP officials from the department of trade and industry (DTI) will be in the high court next week answering charges that they and their former secretary of state Stephen Byers (right) will do anything, however disastrous, to curry favour with the ministry of defence.

Last March, when Byers was still at the DTI, he turned down a long-standing application from a small Welsh company to construct a wind farm in the Kielder Forest in Northumberland. The wind farm is expected to produce 80 megawatts of electricity, nearly two thirds of the total electricity powered by wind in England.

None of the usual objectors – environmental groups, bird societies, etc – could see anything wrong with the plans. The only objector was the ministry of defence whose officials protested that the farm might damage aeroplanes' radar. Strangely, no other country in the world finds that wind farms damage radar.

Normally objections would be tested by public inquiry, but Byers and his officials pointed out that no local authority had objected to the plans, and therefore the MoD objections need not be subjected to such an inquiry. This bizarre interpretation will be challenged at a judicial review sought by Ecogen. The hearings start on 22 October.

Two questions in the case will be of special interest to environmentalists.

1 Since the government and prime minister are committed at so many levels to "green" energy alternatives such as wind energy, why are they so doggedly obstructing this initiative?

2 What is the real reason for the MoD objection, whose stated terms are so transparently ridiculous?

Gas attack!

CHESHIRE planners might wonder why among the thousands of letters protesting at plans for a hideous and huge underground gas storage plant near Middlewich, they have started receiving a some that think it's a jolly good idea.

The plant would store vast quantities of natural gas in nine St Paul's Cathedral-sized caverns. The gas would be pumped in and out at high pressure using three vast turbine compressors. Such high-speed fill and empty plants are new to the UK, and opponents say they have never been placed anywhere near centres of population before. (In the US they are built in wilderness areas.)

With safety experts predicting that an explosion at the plant would see a 700ft-diameter fireball and poisonous gas fall-out for miles around – not to mention the daily nitrous emissions – it is not surprising that planners and the *Sandbach Chronicle* have been deluged with protests.

Now, however, chemical giant Ineos Chlor, fearful that its joint application with Scottish Power will be rejected, has urged its local employees to write to the council's chief planning officer to support the proposals. Not only does Ineos give them ideas about what to write, it emphasises that letters "should be sent from your home address".

Too bad Scottish Power's emissary, tasked with convincing residents that the plant would be good for more than just company profits, admitted at a recent meeting at Goostrey: "It can be dangerous if not handled properly and... er... that's why you would site it away from people."

Daylight McRobbery

IF YOU can't steal pensioners' money in England and Wales, you might be able to get away with it in Scotland. That is the sophisticated position of chancellor Gordon Brown, backed by Labour ministers in the Scottish parliament.

In October 1998, after 18 months' sitting on the fence, the new Labour government finally agreed to pay back to pensioners the surplus their Tory predecessors had stolen from the National Bus workers' pension fund in 1986. In October 1998, at the Labour party conference, John Prescott, then secretary of state at the department of environment and transport, conceded that £355m (including interest) stolen by the Tory government from the pension fund of the privatised National Bus Company should be handed back to pensioners.

After an inordinate delay, and the payment of millions of pounds to rich lawyers, the National Bus pensioners at last got their money. Pensioners of the Scottish Transport Group, a very similar nationalised group of transport companies north of the border, were delighted. They naturally expected that the surplus on their own pension funds would come back to them.

Nothing seemed to happen very quickly until suddenly last December the government faced an awkward by-election in Falkirk, home of many bus pensioners. Suddenly the government announced that the bus pensioners would be getting a £100m windfall from the surplus. Labour duly squeezed home against the SNP.

But wait. No one had revealed the size of the surplus. Months later, on 26 June, Bill McQueen, a senior civil servant in the Scottish executive transport department, blurted out at a finance committee meeting that the surplus on the Scottish Transport Group's pension fund, which had been gathering interest since 1986, was now worth £250m. So why were the pensioners only getting £100m?

Embarrassed Scottish ministers, backed by the British treasury, explained that pensioners from the mainly English National Bus company would get an average of about £7,000 each from the surplus, and the government wanted the same sort of deal for Scotland. That's why the 14,000 Scottish pensioners were going to get a total of £100m. The rest of the fund would be shared by the Inland Revenue (about £100m) and government (about £50m).

This view seemed to have overlooked the main thrust of the pensions ombudsman's determination in the National Bus case: namely that the entire surplus in the pension fund belonged to the pensioners and should be handed to them.

A further problem arose about tax. The government's lawyers discovered to their horror that if money from a pension fund surplus is seized by the employer (in this case the government), tax of 40 percent has to be paid on it. But if the money is paid to the pensioners, there is no tax liability to the fund, and individual pensioners have to pay tax on their share. In effect this means that if the government swipes the surplus, they must pay 40 percent tax (about £100m) and if the pensioners get the money most of them who are very poor will pay no tax at all.

Still further embarrassment arises for Gordon Brown and the relevant Scottish ministers from the fact that the main campaigner for giving back the entire surplus to the pensioners is Dennis Canavan, the Independent MP for the Scottish parliament, who broke with "new" Labour and resigned his Westminster seat. So far he and the pensioners have secured the support of more than 100 of Scotland's 129 MPs.

Dennis Canavan MSP

HOWARD'S END

FOUR Metropolitan police officers will face disciplinary charges of neglect of duty following the death three years ago of Glenn Howard, a 54-year-old mentally ill man whom they had detained, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) has decided.

Eye readers (1003) will recall that Mr Howard was involved in a struggle with officers from Sutton police station when they tried to return him to hospital. The inquest jury was so shocked by events surrounding his death, it defied the coroner's instruction not to comment on the case. The Croydon jurors blamed Metropolitan police officers for "using excessive restraint followed by an immediate and subsequent neglect of medical care and attention".

Three jurors went even further, shouting to Mr Howard's family that they had wanted to return a verdict of unlawful killing but that they had been blocked by the coroner, John Sampson.

The disciplinary charges only relate to the issue of neglect of medical care. Two additional officers are to receive a "ticking off" — not for what the jury found to be "excessive restraint" but for failing to warn other officers that Mr Howard was a vulnerable patient. The crown prosecution service (CPS) has already decided no officer will face criminal charges.

Deborah Coles of Inquest, the organisation that monitors deaths in custody, said: "These charges simply do not reflect the evidence heard at the inquest about the excessive restraint methods used by police against a man with a known mental illness. To now learn that the two officers directly involved in the initial restraint are not even to face disciplinary charges makes a mockery of the police complaints system."

Daniel Machover, the family's lawyer, has lodged the case with the European court of human rights and is considering whether to ask the high court to review the PCA's controversial decision.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

● **MMR:** In the last *Eye* we reported how the two authors of the latest pro-MMR paper, David Elliman and Helen Bedford, acknowledged that they have received funding from vaccine manufacturers to "conduct research and attend educational meetings". We should also have detailed the links with the pharmaceutical giants of Dr Elizabeth Miller, head of immunisation at the government's public health laboratory service (PHLS).

She wrote the accompanying favourable commentary to the paper (and was one of the scientists involved in the first trial of MMR in the UK involving 10,000 children, which paved the way for its licence.)

In the latest annual report for the "Medicines Act 1968 Advisory Bodies", she lists five "non-personal" interests – payments which benefit her department rather than herself personally. They are grants from Baxter Healthcare, Wyeth Lederle Vaccines, Chiron Biocine, and SmithKline Beecham and "CMI testing in adolescent sera", courtesy of Aventis Pasteur.

SmithKline and Aventis are both manufacturers of MMR and defendants in the forthcoming high court case of children who claim they were damaged by the jab.

A spokesman for the PHLS said the grants were given to the PHLS "for various research projects. They are listed under Dr Miller's name simply because she is the member of staff designated by the PHLS as the project lead for these grants." So that's all right, then.

● **CAPE PLC:** The *Eye* wishes to apologise for suggesting six months ago that Cape plc was facing up to its scandalous treatment of thousands of black South Africans who were forced to work without protection in its poisonous asbestos mines and factories and are now suffering from rare cancers and lung disease.

We reported that after years of protracted legal action in which Cape refused to compensate the South African workers – while making payments to similarly injured British workers – the company was finally looking to settle the claims.

Instead of putting a decent sum on the table to be divided among the claimants and their families, though, Cape has erected a series of costly and time-wasting obstacles in the paths of the South Africans.

It is maintaining that all claimants must prove their employment with Cape – yet most workers never had contracts and were paid in cash (which was spent on food in the Cape shop). As old Cape documents reveal: "No native has ever asked for a contract and no contract has been offered."

Cape, however, did have employment records and, more importantly, at one stage had a list of workers with some kind of asbestos-related disease. But its records appear to have been lost or destroyed in the abandoned mines and factories.

Cape also disputes the fact that some of the mines where the workers say they were poisoned were actually Cape concerns. For example, black workers called the mine in the Northern Province "Makapeng" – translated as "mother of Penge", another Cape mine. Cape maintains that as the mine is properly known as Malipsdrift, they are not talking about the same place.

Cape has insisted too on a medical review of the claimants, suggesting in court last year that it would show that most did not have an asbestos-related disease. So far 85 percent have been confirmed. Cape was supposed to pay 50 percent of the costs of those cases which were positively diagnosed and whose medical records indicated employment with Cape.

So far the Legal Services Commission which is funding the South African's legal action has paid out £37,000 with another bill for more than £30,000 pending. But Cape's failure to agree the identity of some of the mines like "Makapeng" means it has yet to foot its share of the bill.

Meanwhile the company has been anxious to recoup some of its extraordinary costs. Leigh Day and Co, the UK solicitors acting for South African workers, managed to get hold of a few boxes of documents from an old abandoned Cape mine at Koegas in the Northern Cape. But they had to give them to Cape to decontaminate them. Cape has now asked the South Africans to pay half the costs. Cape has been politely told to "get lost".

● **CAMMELL LAIRD:** The last *Eye* told of the sale by receiver PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) of the recently-thriving Cammell Laird shipyard to A&P, a company which employs PWC and is owned by the bank which appointed PWC. All the workers were sacked.

The *Eye* understands the price paid by A&P was not much more than £9.5m, and that another bid – by Manchester venture capitalists Aberdeen Murray Johnstone – for just over £9m was not even considered before the yard was knocked down. An interesting difference between the two bids was that Aberdeen Murray Johnstone intended to keep the yard working with at least some of the workers employed there, while A&P had no such intention.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE global hunt for Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda money trail has so far produced limited results. Much of the $24m traced and frozen since 11 September appears to have a greater connection to the Taliban regime than to bin Laden or Al-Qaeda, unless you accept the Bush/Blair spin that they are one and the same.

That is a somewhat excessive if convenient interpretation given that bin Laden is an inspirational rather than managerial figure for Islamic terrorists in a network which stretches way beyond Afghanistan. Certainly the majority of the $100m-plus frozen before the suicide attacks on New York and Washington as a result of United Nations sanctions was linked to the Taliban-Afghan banks, charities, institutions and airlines.

The problem for those following the money trail is bin Laden's greater reliance on less transparent financial routes, institutions and locations than high street or City banks. As pointed out by the *Eye* in recent issues, there is considerable use of the traditional *hawala* or *hundi* system reliant on brokers and foreign exchange dealers who keep few if any records and transfer money internationally, relying on little more than trust and a coded message or paper that ensures payment. Another favourite has been the Islamic banks which now operate worldwide handling billions of dollars.

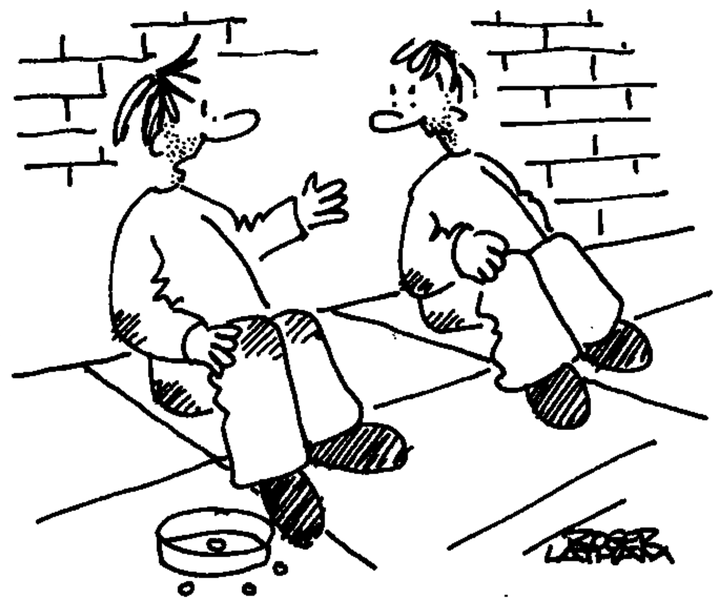
But some of the less reputable tax havens are also said to be part of the Al-Qaeda scheme of things.

Switzerland, Panama, the Bahamas and Gibraltar have already blipped on the investigators' radar. So far only Switzerland and the Bahamas would seem to have shown evidence of possible bin Laden business connections. Panama and Gibraltar maintain they have no terrorist money.

Another target is the unrecognised Turkish-Cypriot enclave of Northern Cyprus where brass plate offshore banks have multiplied in recent years involving dubious people with equally dubious purposes. Northern Cyprus is ideal because it has diplomatic relations only with Turkey but good links to the fellow Muslim former Soviet Central Asian states, several of which border Afghanistan.

Information from a former bin Laden Saudi associate has suggested that he opened accounts at banks in Northern Cyprus for business in Central Asia with the help of businessmen with close ties to the administration run by Turkish Cypriot president Rauf Denktash. Just how well local banks are regulated has been proved by a series of bank crashes and the evidence of money laundering of Turkish heroin cash.

Bin Laden would not be the first fugitive or criminal to find help and sanctuary in Northern Cyprus. Former Polly Peck tycoon Asil Nadir



"I invested in UK Growth Plus, Perpetual Global Dynamic Theme, Capital Growth Strategy, World Growth & Income and Low Risk Wealth Management Fidelity... until all my money had gone"

continues to hide there as do a number of lesser crooks.

Bin Laden's former associate also reported he used banks in the former Soviet states bordering Afghanistan. Hardly surprising as all of them are crucial to the onward movement of heroin on which bin Laden and the Taliban have been dependent for a large part of their cash flow. So too, it should be said, are the west's new best friends, the Northern Alliance.

Uzbekistan, supplying bases for US troops and planes, is not just a poppy grower but a key link for the Russian Mafia which controls much of the heroin trade. Uzbek gangsters are major players in the drug business. Their leaders are well connected with America's friends in the Uzbek government. Similar narco-alliances exist in Tajikistan, Kirgyzstan and Turkmenistan, not to mention of course Pakistan which processes most of Afghanistan's opium into heroin. But then these are inconvenient truths never mentioned when Afghanistan is blamed for the world's heroin problems.

Just how much assistance the US can look for in finding bin Laden cash in banks in Central Asia is very much open to question. Northern Cyprus will depend on just how much muscle is applied by Turkey – Denktash's paymaster.

FOLLOWERS of the Serious Farce Office have been unsurprised at Britain surpassing Liechtenstein, not to mention such lesser secrecy havens as Luxembourg and Switzerland, in failing to hand over funds looted by Nigeria's late and unlamented dictator General Sani Abacha.

More than $1bn was laundered through British banks by Abacha's kleptocratic family and associates. But while other countries acted on requests for assistance from the new civilian Nigerian government and the Swiss, Britain dithered pleading legal or evidential problems, while no doubt those controlling the Abacha fortune moved the money elsewhere.

No sooner had Britain belatedly decided it could help, which took several months, and agreed to freeze bank accounts, than within three months the investigative and seizure process was brought to a halt by a judicial review of that decision. So after more than a year still no money has been handed over in Britain. No doubt should Osama bin Laden wish to argue similar legal points he would also find lawyers concerned about his human rights regarding frozen terrorist funds.

For a large, and the latest, part of the embarrassing Nigerian fiasco a key player has been former SFO case controller Lorna Harris, who now heads the central authority department at the home office which processes all foreign requests for assistance.

SFO watchers will recall that Harris was in charge of the Polly Peck inquiry when a series of potentially disastrous mistakes were made culminating in the then attorney-general Sir Nicholas Lyell having to apologise for misleading the House of Commons. Harris was discreetly moved out of the SFO on secondment to APACS, the banking clearing system overseer, while an internal inquiry was completed. On appeal most if not all the disciplinary findings were overturned.

Harris briefly returned to the SFO to take over its mutual assistance section before being seconded again to a lucrative legal advisory post in Brussels. From there she returned to take over at the home office where once again she would have appeared to have excelled.

THE email epidemic of Nigerian "419" frauds continues unabated. Those behind it spread the net wider to hide the origin of the scam. Previous *Eyes* have reported the appearance of supposed controllers of large stolen funds in Ivory Coast and Togo banks and the source of the looted money being from dead corrupt Sierra Leone diamond mining officials or rebel soldiers or foreign businessmen without heirs.

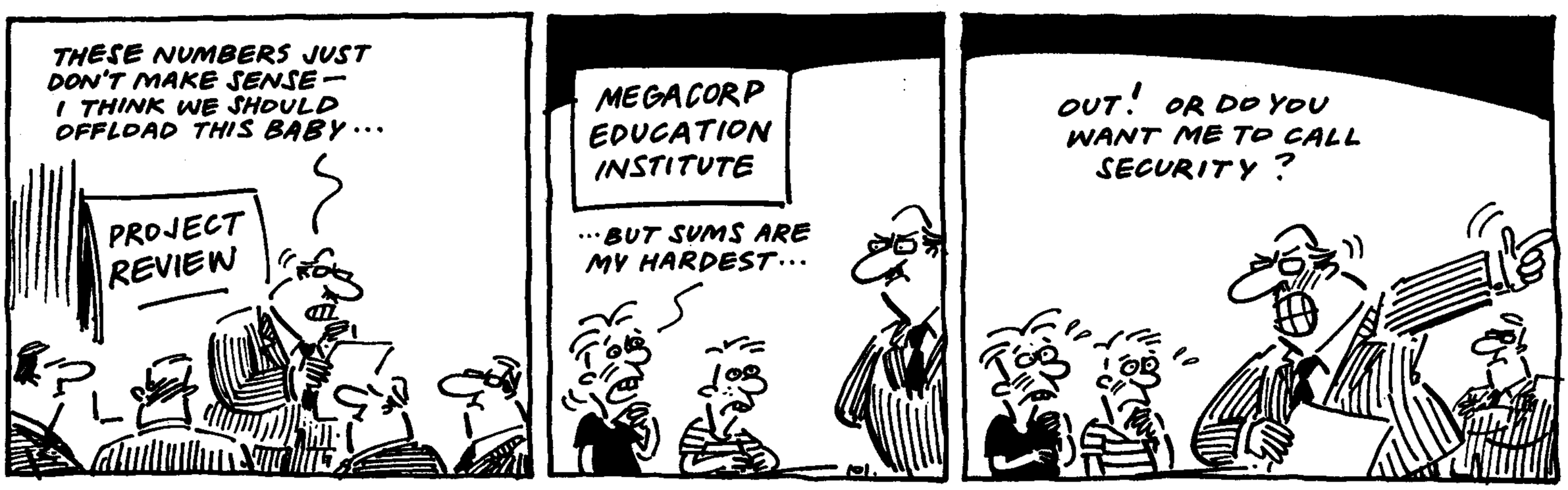
A current favourite is to claim to be one of the three wives of assassinated Congo dictator Laurent Kabila. So far emails claiming to be from Mary and Theresa Kabila have been circulating in cyberspace wanting help to release $20.5m or $25m held in South Africa or Ivory Coast. A Colonel Sam Sambo Malekwe, claiming to be a former adviser to Kabila, has also got into the act offering $75m from South Africa.

One *Eye* reader has logged almost 20 such invitations via the internet in the past 18 months. All came from supposed Nigerian officials, mostly in the National Petroleum Corporation or the Ministry of Works and Housing, or lawyers. There are even offers from Abacha's widow as if Britain had not been helpful enough.

South Africa is becoming a regular source for the emails. Victims are increasingly invited down there to meet those who control large cash sums held in boxes at unidentified secure locations. Previously the scam relied on the victims handing

THE DIRECTORS

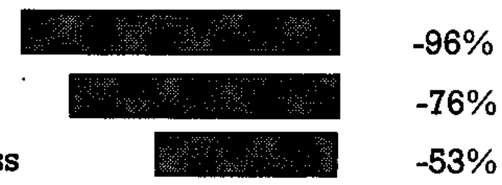
DREDGE/RIGG


THESE NUMBERS JUST DON'T MAKE SENSE— I THINK WE SHOULD OFFLOAD THIS BABY...
PROJECT REVIEW
MEGACORP EDUCATION INSTITUTE
...BUT SUMS ARE MY HARDEST...
OUT! OR DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL SECURITY?

Stock Horror

Former US Ambassador Ray Seitz – a very 'special' relationship with UK companies

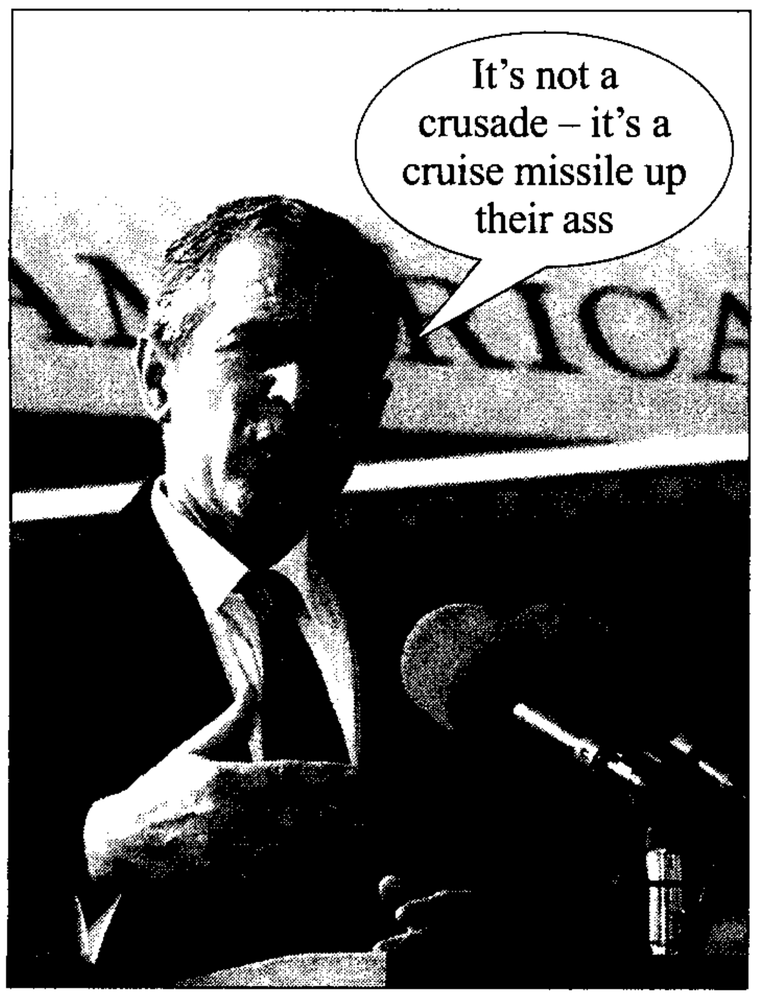
Share performance, measured against the market, since Seitz joined the board of...



over bank details in London or elsewhere and never visiting the supposed source of the money they were to help steal. But that also seems too obvious after publicity about the thousands already taken in so new tricks are required.

The "mark" has merely to pretend – in return for a healthy slice of the loot – that he is the true beneficiary of the dead owner or provide a foreign or non-resident bank account into which the grieving widow/son can pay the contents of the strong box which never seems to contain less than $20m.

Anyone who makes that trip could end up in a box after handing over their bank details for pillaging by the fraudsmen. Several already have. One British victim only narrowly escaped. But the emails keep on coming.



BUSINESS services group Hays paid £800,000 to get rid of its managing director John Cole. He quit in June after the board lost confidence following problems with the logistics division, especially in Germany and Spain, which resulted in a profit warning earlier this year. Hays profits and shares subsequently slumped. Cole earned in total £1.3m for his last year at Hays after earning almost £1m the previous year.

Hays shareholders might be interested to know that four years ago it was pointed out in *Eye* 935 that Cole, who had recently joined Hays to run its logistics division, had previously left Australian group Mayne Nickless under a cloud after big problems with its European logistics operations which he ran and which had suffered heavy losses. Hays subsequently bought Mayne Nickless' Benelux and French logistics subsidiaries.

History, it seems, has repeated itself – but not at the expense of John Cole.

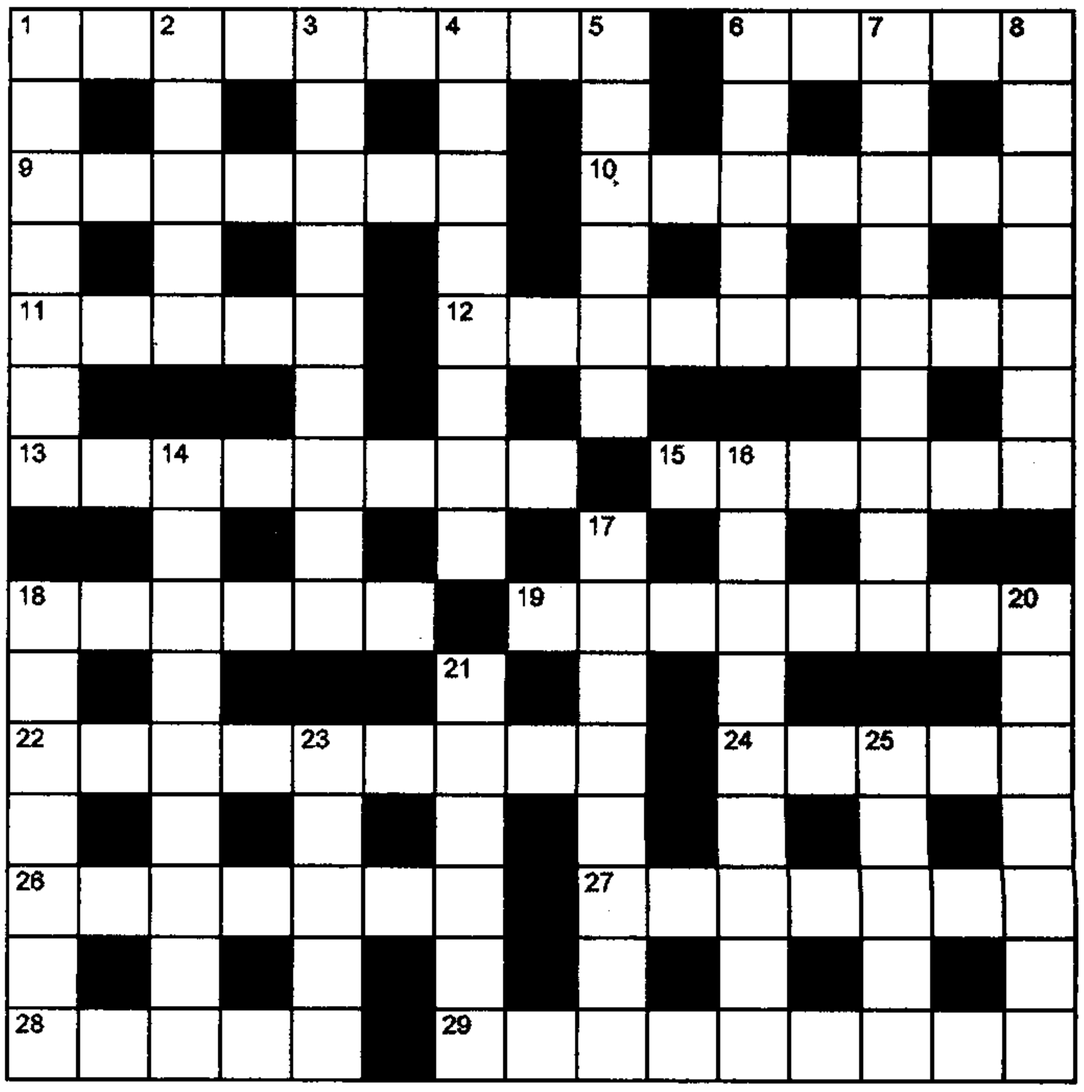
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 194

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 26 October 2001.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 It's smashing having an erection and compensating for shrinkage (7,2)
6 Pages piss around with computer (5)
9 Pisspoor *Sun*, embracing spin, straightens out a wind-up (7)
10 Hire woman's underwear but fail to keep it buttoned (3,4)
11 Scorer's desire to abandon willy during hand stimulation (5)
12 *Hello* curse not long in its undoing of Randy (9)
13/2/6dn/16 Indicating Sir Henry, note, races male to China, pumping ship (8,5,2,3,9)
15 So unlikely to catch the stench of high flatulence? (6)
18 First person abroad to have a woman is childish (6)
19 If in drag, getting screwed is not OK in polite society (5,3)
22 Member hated getting excited devising gear for head (6,3)
24 Try amphetamines for instance (5)
26 Constable possibly responsible for smear on Brenda (7)
27 As one forced to be a goer, seductress accepts a hint (7)
28 PM endlessly getting high on speed (3-2)
29 Blair's just started on downfall: to flap is a good idea (9)

ACROSS

1 Grope and come together out of bed (5,2)
2 See 13 Across
3 Is Heather putting on weight in a capital place? (9)
4 Terrible slag – one, er, getting end away but no longer crude (8)
5 Not the whole of a football club could accommodate Brenda (6)
6 See 13 Across
7 Subjected to piss-taking, I start filming backwards in black and white (9)
8 Once popped the question with no clothes on? (7)
14 Jack's ensnared by contaminated nicotine fix (9)
16 See 13 Across
17 Marijuana: the main content's an abomination! (8)
18 Prize beer belly on Nicholson (7)
20 What determines the sexual orientation of queenly Kelly? (3,4)
21 Singer has no right getting a massage, being an innocent young thing (6)
23 Apt to get involved with EU? Go stuff yourself! (3,2)
25 Twiggy-bashing might follow such a steamy session (5)

Crossword 193 winner ALISON WATERS

Solution to Crossword 193

ACROSS: 1/6 Brahms and Liszt 9 Overlap 10 Pie-eyed 11 Emote 12 Radio Five 13/15 Pissed as a newt 18 Asps 20 Dysphasia 23 Tap-dancer 26 Liana 27 Mugshot 28 Locales 29 Shred 30 Plastered.

DOWN: 1 Booze-ups 2 Ale-houses 3 Maltese 4 Ampersand 5 Doped 6 Lie-down 7 Styli 8 Todger 14 Australia 16 Wassailer 17 Rat-arsed 19 Smashed 21 Half cut 22 Stumps 24 Pager 25 Cut up.

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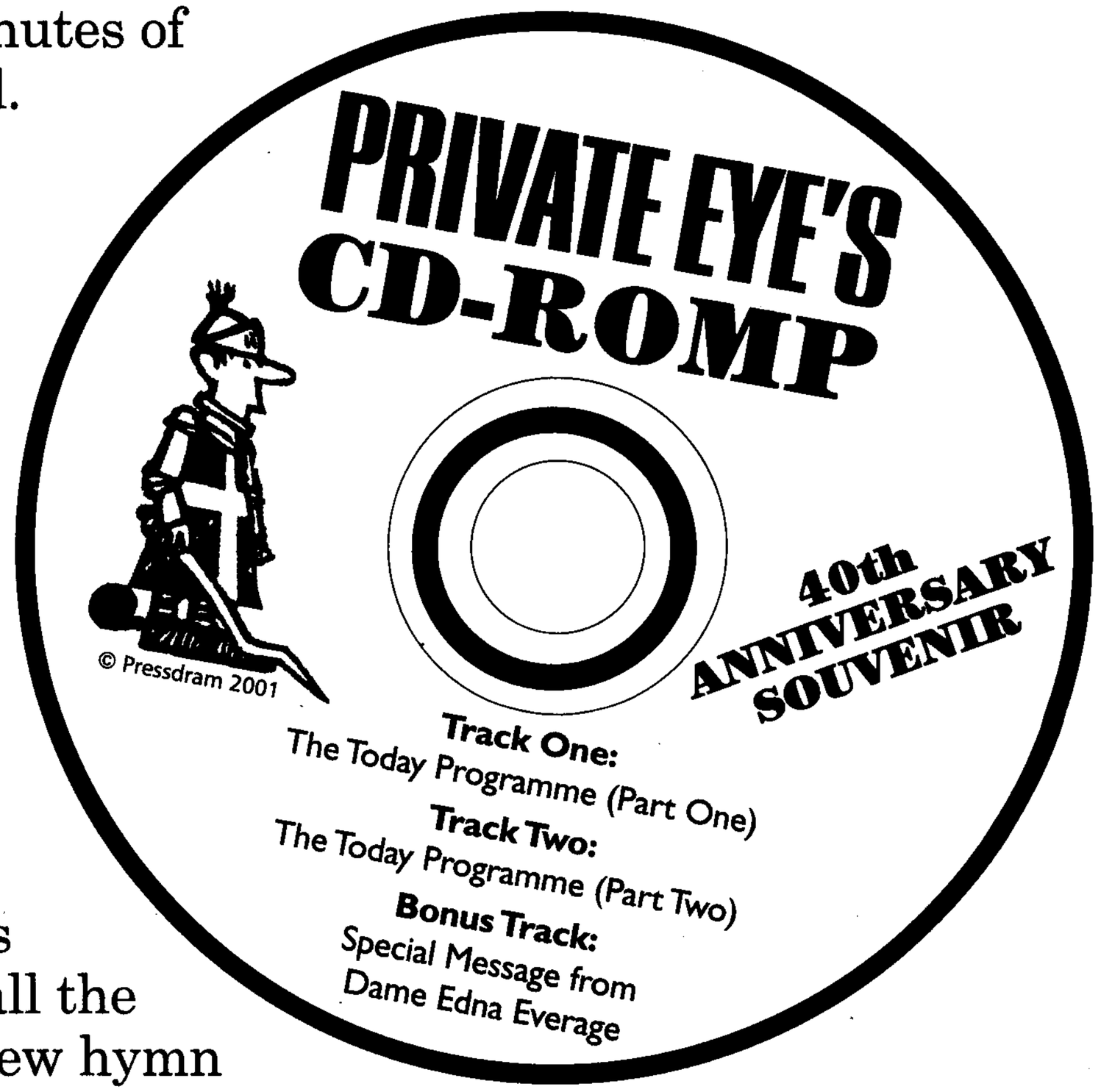

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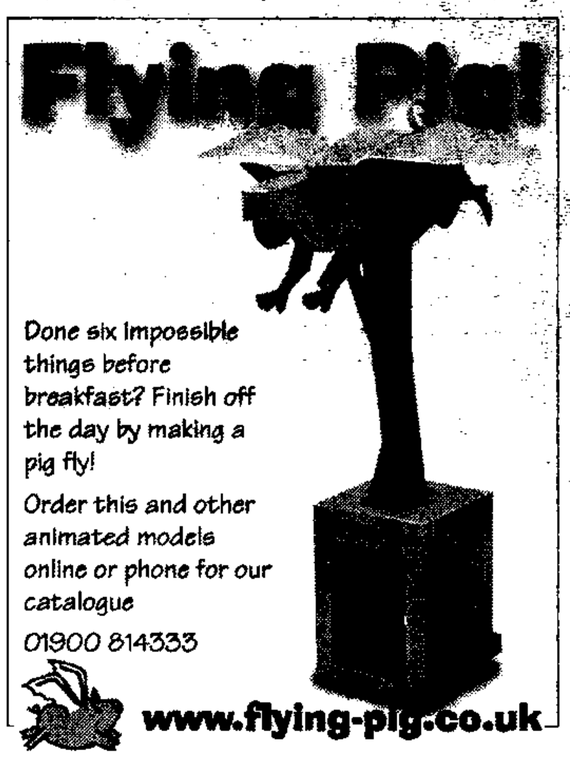
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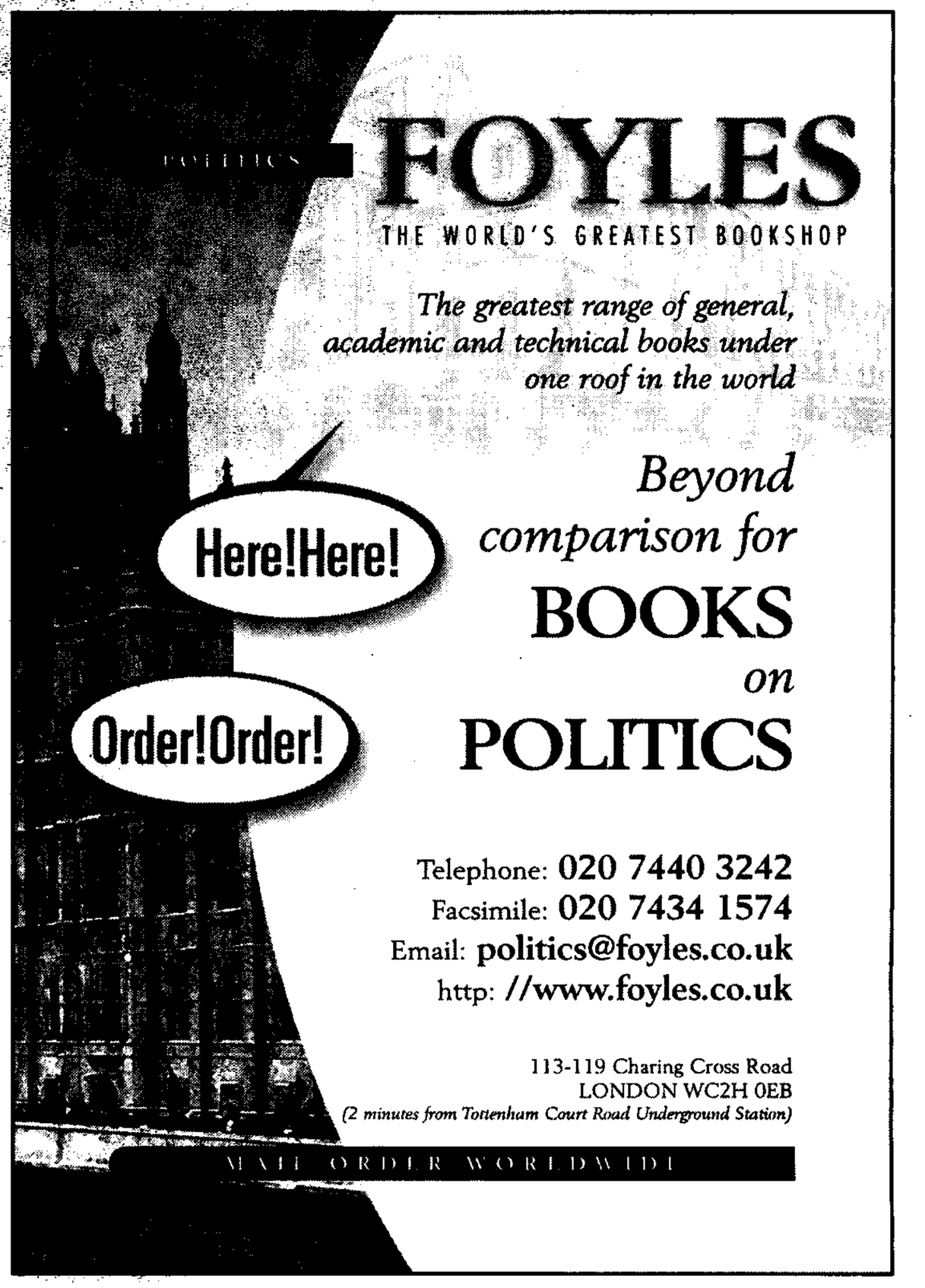

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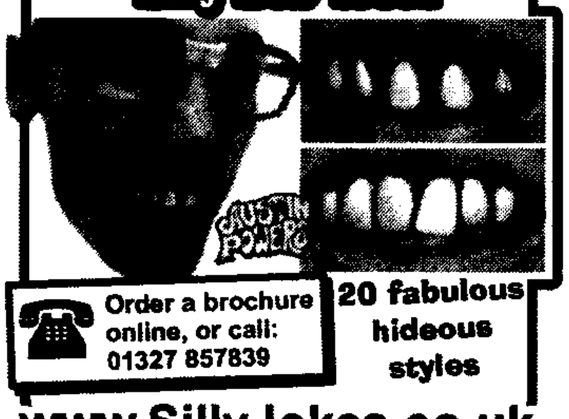

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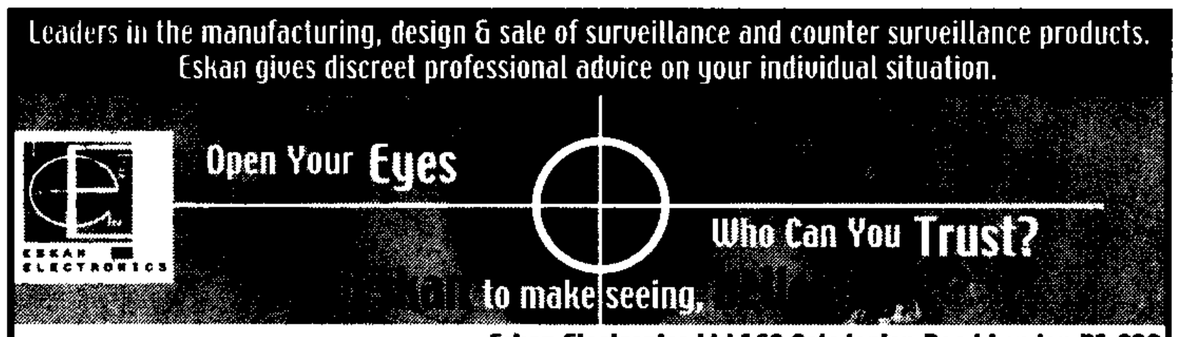
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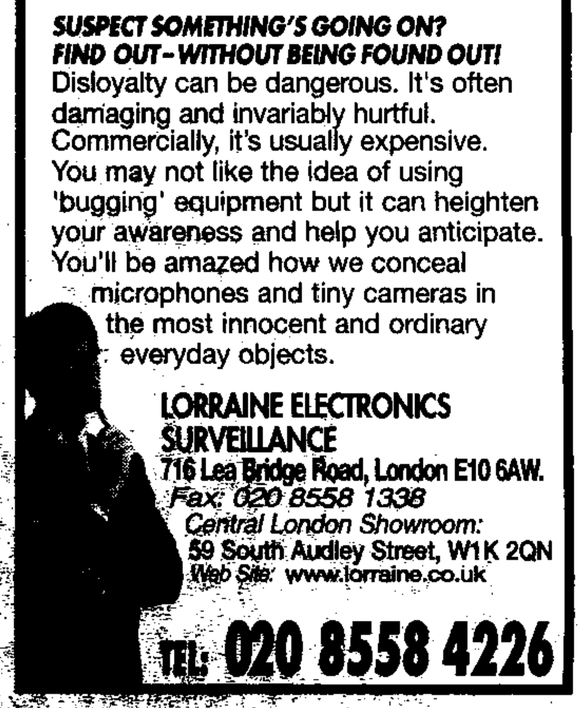

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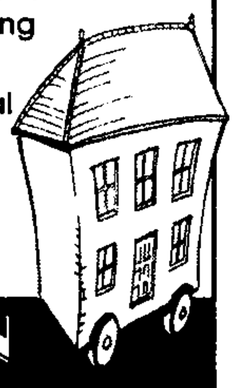

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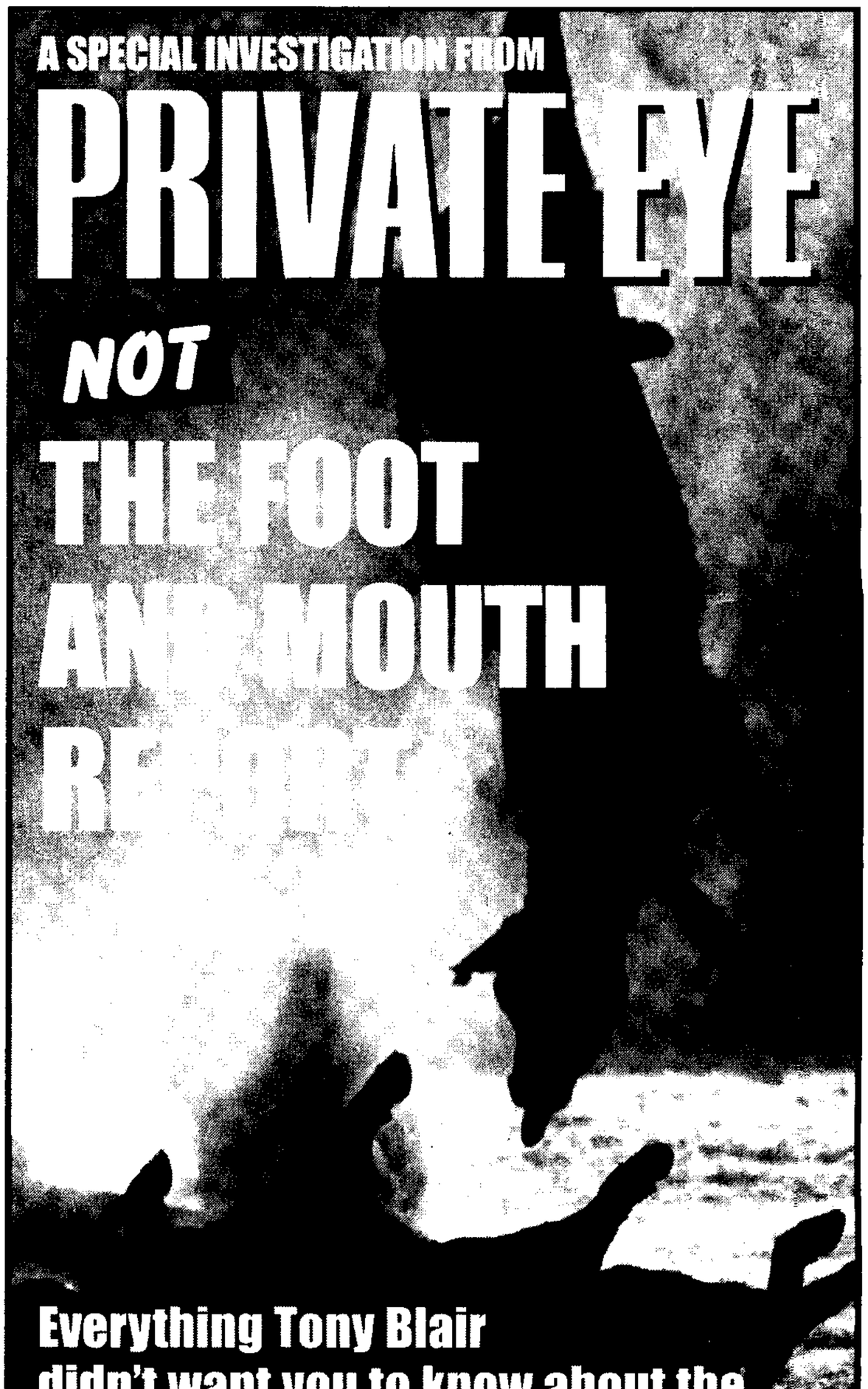

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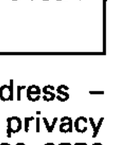

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1993	Ⓜ	£ 290
1989		£ 570

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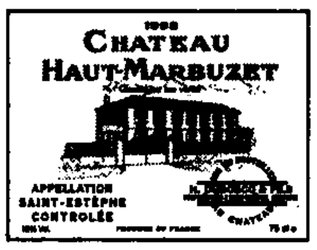

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1997	Ⓜ	£ 280
1996		£ 320

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❤ 1998	Ⓜ	£ 280
1997	Ⓜ	£ 220
1996	Ⓜ	£ 350
1995	Ⓜ	£ 330
1994	Ⓜ	£ 300
1993	Ⓜ	£ 290

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❤ 1998	Ⓜ	£ 150
❤ 1997	Ⓜ	£ 120
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1998	Ⓜ	£ 310
1997	Ⓜ	£ 270
1994		£ 300
1993		£ 280

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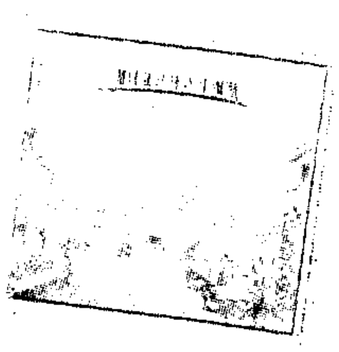

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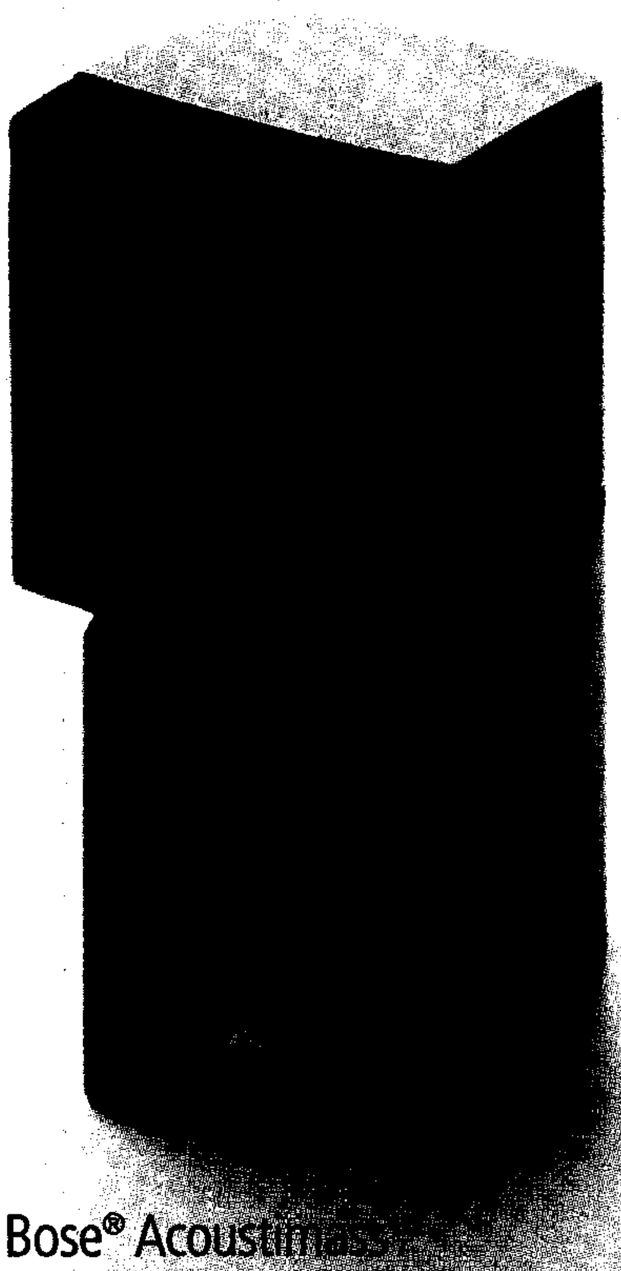

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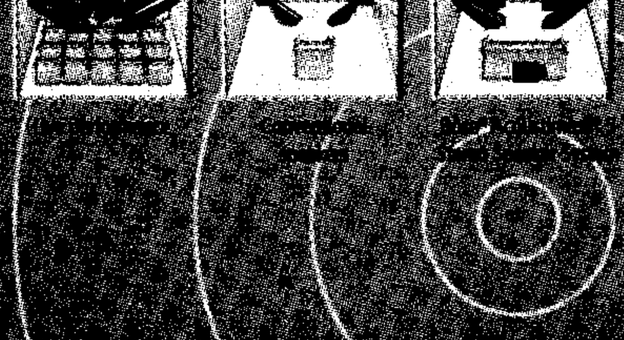

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